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June

THE ASA RULE
by Jay Williams

POUL ANDERSON
ARTHUR C. CLARKE
C. S. FORESTER
STUART PALMER
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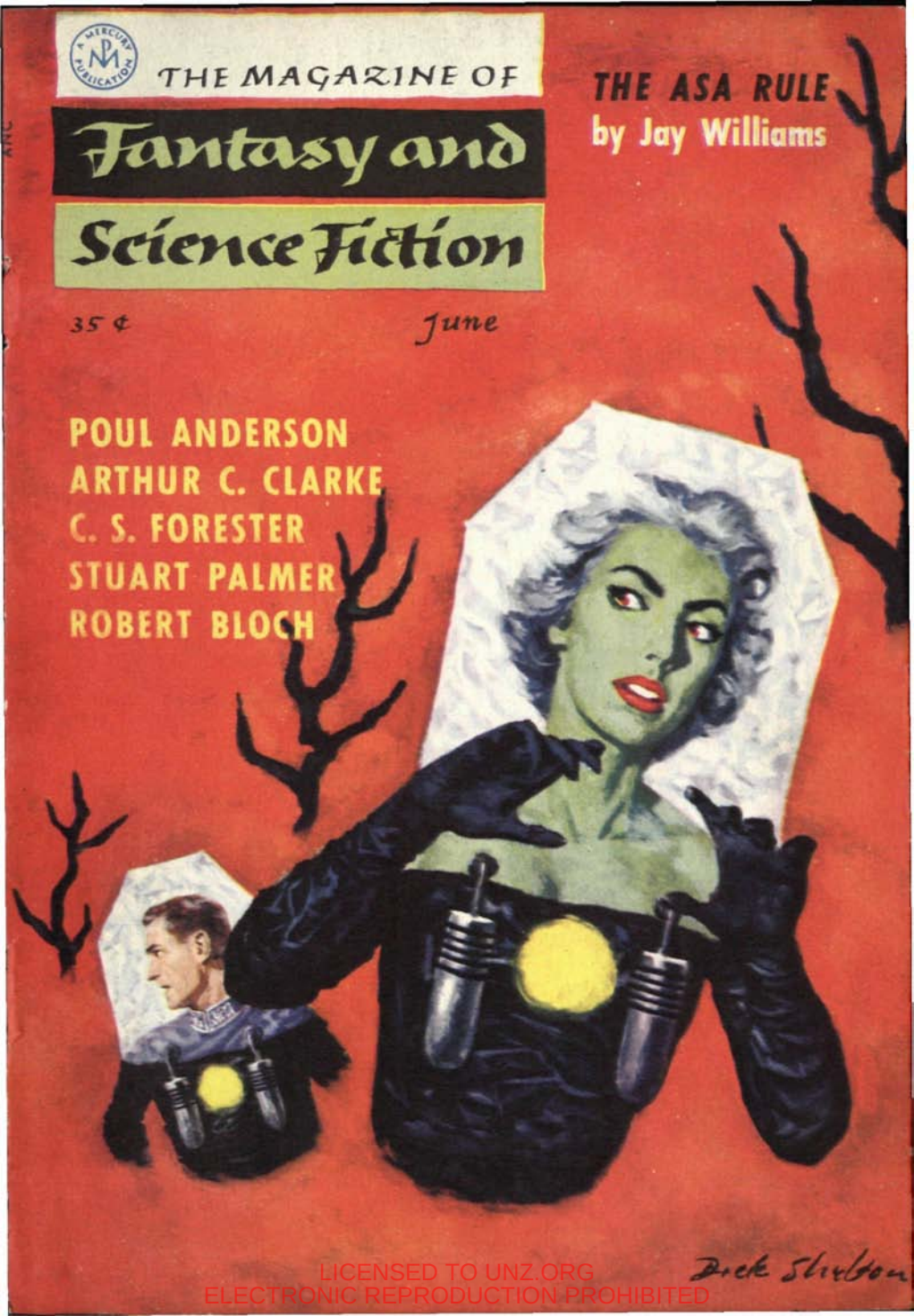

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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

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How rarely science fiction writers succeed in creating a wholly alien culture may be judged from any adequate study of an earthly culture of a time or place which does not form part of our direct heritage. S.f.'s aliens may have pseudopods or superscientific gadgets, but rarely so wholly different a frame of reference as man himself has achieved in other eras. Here F&SF's favorite Scandinavian skald takes us to Iceland near the end of the tenth century and convincingly depicts a truly "alien" way of life — and teaches us the tragic truth that the role of a twentieth century time-traveler to a "primitive" culture need not necessarily be that of Prometheus the Fire-Bringer.

The Man Who Came Early

by POUL ANDERSON

YES, WHEN A MAN GROWS OLD HE has heard so much that is strange there's little more can surprise him. They say the king in Miklagard has a beast of gold before his high seat which stands up and roars. I have it from Eilif Eiriksson, who served in the guard down there, and he is a steady fellow when not drunk. He has also seen the Greek fire used, it burns on water.

So, priest, I am not unwilling to believe what you say about the White Christ. I have been in England and France myself, and seen how the folk prosper. He must be a very powerful god, to ward so many realms . . . and did you say that everyone who is baptized will be given a white robe? I would like to have one. They mildew, of course, in this cursed wet Iceland weather, but a small sacrifice to the house-elves should — No sacrifices? Come now! I'll give up horseflesh if I must, my teeth not being what they were, but every sensible man knows how much trouble the elves make if they're not fed.

. . . Well, let's have another cup and talk about it. How do you like the beer? It's my own brew, you know. The cups I got in England, many years back. I was a young man then . . . time goes, time goes. Afterward I came back and inherited this my father's steading, and have not left it since. Well enough to go in viking as a youth, but grown older you see where the real wealth

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lies: here, in the land and the cattle.

Stoke up the fires, Hjalti. It's growing cold. Sometimes I think the winters are colder than when I was a boy. Thorbrand of the Salmondale says so, but he believes the gods are angry because so many are turning from them. You'll have trouble winning Thorbrand over, priest. A stubborn man. Myself I am open-minded, and willing to listen at least.

. . . Now, then. There is one point on which I must correct you. The end of the world is not coming in two years. This I know.

And if you ask me how I know, that's a very long tale, and in some ways a terrible one. Glad I am to be old, and safely in the earth before that great tomorrow comes. It will be an eldritch time before the frost giants march . . . oh, very well, before the angel blows his battle horn. One reason I hearken to your preaching is that I know the White Christ will conquer Thor. I know Iceland is going to be Christian erelong, and it seems best to range myself on the winning side.

No, I've had no visions. This is a happening of five years ago, which my own household and neighbors can swear to. They mostly did not believe what the stranger told; I do, more or less, if only because I don't think a liar could wreak so much harm. I loved my daughter, priest, and after it was over I made a good marriage for her. She did not naysay it, but now she sits out on the ness-farm with her husband and never a word to me; and I hear he is ill pleased with her silence and moodiness, and spends his nights with an Irish concubine. For this I cannot blame him, but it grieves me.

Well, I've drunk enough to tell the whole truth now, and whether you believe it or not makes no odds to me. Here . . . you, girls! . . . fill these cups again, for I'll have a dry throat before I finish the telling.

It begins, then, on a day in early summer, five years ago. At that time, my wife Ragnhild and I had only two unwed children still living with us: our youngest son Helgi, of seventeen winters, and our daughter Thorgunna, of eighteen. The girl, being fair, had already had suitors. But she refused them, and I am not a man who would compel his daughter. As for Helgi, he was ever a lively one, good with his hands but a breackneck youth. He is now serving in the guard of King Olaf of Norway. Besides these, of course, we had about ten housefolk — two Irish thralls, two girls to help with the women's work, and half a dozen hired carles. This is not a small steading.

You have not seen how my land lies. About two miles to the west is the bay; the thorps at Reykjavik are about five miles south. The land rises toward the Long Jökull, so that my acres are hilly; but it's good hayland, and there is often driftwood on the beach. I've built a shed down

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there for it, as well as a boathouse.

There had been a storm the night before, so Helgi and I were going down to look for drift. You, coming from Norway, do not know how precious wood is to us Icelanders, who have only a few scrubby trees and must bring all our timber from abroad. Back there men have often been burned in their houses by their foes, but we count that the worst of deeds, though it's not unknown.

I was on good terms with my neighbors, so we took only hand-weapons. I my ax, Helgi a sword, and the two carles we had with us bore spears. It was a day washed clean by the night's fury, and the sun fell bright on long wet grass. I saw my garth lying rich around its courtyard, sleek cows and sheep, smoke rising from the roofhole of the hall, and knew I'd not done so ill in my lifetime. My son Helgi's hair fluttered in the low west wind as we left the steading behind a ridge and neared the water. Strange how well I remember all which happened that day, somehow it was a sharper day than most.

When we came down to the strand, the sea was beating heavy, white and gray out to the world's edge. A few gulls flew screaming above us, frightened off a cod washed up onto the shore. I saw there was a litter of no few sticks, even a baulk of timber . . . from some ship carrying it that broke up during the night, I suppose. That was a useful find, though as a careful man I would later sacrifice to be sure the owner's ghost wouldn't plague me.

We had fallen to and were dragging the baulk toward the shed when Helgi cried out. I ran for my ax as I looked the way he pointed. We had no feuds then, but there are always outlaws.

This one seemed harmless, though. Indeed, as he stumbled nearer across the black sand I thought him quite unarmed and wondered what had happened. He was a big man and strangely clad — he wore coat and breeches and shoes like anyone else, but they were of peculiar cut and he bound his trousers with leggings rather than thongs. Nor had I ever seen a helmet like his: it was almost square, and came down to cover his neck, but it had no noseguard; it was held in place by a leather strap, and I found later that it had no cap beneath it. And this you may not believe, but it was made all in one piece, as if it had been cast, with not a single mark of the hammer!

He broke into a staggering run as he neared, and flapped his arms and croaked something. The tongue was none I had ever heard, and I have heard many; it was like dogs barking. I saw that he was clean-shaven and his black hair cropped short, and thought he might be French. Otherwise he was a young man, and good-looking, with blue eyes and regular features. From his skin I judged that he spent much time indoors, yet he had a fine manly build.

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"Could he have been shipwrecked?" asked Helgi.

"His clothes are dry and unstained," I said; "nor has he been wandering long, for there's no stubble on his chin. Yet I've heard of no strangers guesting hereabouts."

We lowered our weapons, and he came up to us and stood gasping. I saw that his coat and the shirt behind were fastened with brazen buttons rather than laces, and were of heavy weave. About his neck he had fastened a strip of cloth tucked into his coat. These garments were all in hues of greenish brown. His shoes were of a sort new to me, very well cobbled. Here and there on his coat were other bits of brass, and he had three broken stripes on each sleeve. On the left arm, too, was a black band with white letters, the same letters being on his helmet. Those were not runes, but Roman letters —thus: MP. He wore a broad belt, with a small club-like thing of metal in a sheath at the hip.

"I think he must be a warlock," muttered my carle Sigurd. "Why else all those tokens?"

"They may only be ornament, or to ward against witchcraft," I soothed him. Then, to the stranger. "I hight Ospak Ulfsson of Hillstead. What is your errand?"

He stood with his chest heaving and a wildness in his eyes. He must have run a long way. Then he moaned and sat down and covered his face.

"If he's sick, best we get him to the house," said Helgi. His eyes gleamed — we see so few new faces here.

"No . . . no . . ." The stranger looked up. "Let me rest a moment —"

He spoke the Norse tongue readily enough, though with a thick accent not easy to follow and with many foreign words I did not understand.

The other carle, Grim, hefted his spear. "Have vikings landed?" he asked.

"When did vikings ever come to Iceland?" I snorted. "It's the other way around."

The newcomer shook his head, as if it had been struck. He got shakily to his feet. "What happened?" he said. "What happened to the city?"

"What city?" I asked reasonably.

"Reykjavik!" he groaned. "Where is it?"

"Five miles south, the way you came — unless you mean the bay itself," I said.

"No! There was only a beach, and a few wretched huts, and —"

"Best not let Hjalmar Broadnose hear you call his thorp that," I counseled.

"But there was a city!" he cried. Wildness lay in his eyes. "I was crossing the street, it was a storm, and there was a crash and then I stood on the beach and the city was gone!"

"He's mad," said Sigurd, backing away. "Be careful . . . if he starts to foam at the mouth, it means he's going berserk."

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"Who are you?" babbled the stranger. "What are you doing in those clothes? Why the spears?"

"Somehow," said Helgi," he does not sound crazed — only frightened and bewildered. Something evil has happened to him."

"I'm not staying near a man under a curse!" yelped Sigurd, and started to run away.

"Come back!" I bawled. "Stand where you are or I'll cleave your louse-bitten head!"

That stopped him, for he had no kin who would avenge him; but he would not come closer. Meanwhile the stranger had calmed down to the point where he could at least talk evenly.

"Was it the *aitchbomb?*" He asked. "Has the war started?"

He used that word often, *aitchbomb*, so I know it now, though unsure of what it means. It seems to be a kind of Greek fire. As for the war, I knew not which war he meant, and told him so.

"There was a great thunderstorm last night," I added. "And you say you were out in one too. Perhaps Thor's hammer knocked you from your place to here."

"But where is here?" he replied. His voice was more dulled than otherwise, now that the first terror had lifted.

"I told you. This is Hillstead, which is on Iceland."

"But that's where I was!" he mumbled. "Reykjavik . . . what happened? Did the *aitchbomb* destroy everything while I was unconscious?"

"Nothing has been destroyed," I said.

"Perhaps he means the fire at Olafsvik last month," said Helgi.

"No, no, no!" He buried his face in his hands. After a while he looked up and said. "See here. I am Sergeant Gerald Roberts of the United States Army base on Iceland. I was in Reykjavik and got struck by lightning or something. Suddenly I was standing on the beach, and got frightened and ran. That's all. Now, can you tell me how to get back to the base?"

Those were more or less his words, priest. Of course, we did not grasp half of it, and made him repeat it several times and explain the words. Even then we did not understand, except that he was from some country called the United States of America, which he said lies beyond Greenland to the west, and that he and some others were on Iceland to help our folk against their enemies. Now this I did not consider a lie — more a mistake or imagining. Grim would have cut him down for thinking us stupid enough to swallow that tale, but I could see that he meant it.

Trying to explain it to us cooled him off. "Look here," he said, in too reasonable a tone for a feverish man, "perhaps we can get at the truth from your side. Has there been no war you know of? Nothing which — Well, look here. My country's

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men first came to Iceland to guard it against the Germans . . . now it is the Russians, but then it was the Germans. When was that?"

Helgi shook his head. "That never happened that I know of," he said. "Who are these Russians?" He found out later that Gardariki was meant. "Unless," he said, "the old warlocks —"

"He means the Irish monks," I explained. "There were a few living here when the Norsemen came, but they were driven out. That was, hm, somewhat over a hundred years ago. Did your folk ever help the monks?"

"I never heard of them!" he said. His breath sobbed in his throat. "You . . . didn't you Icelanders come from Norway?"

"Yes, about a hundred years ago," I answered patiently. "After King Harald Fairhair took all the Norse lands and —"

"*A hundred years ago!*" he whispered. I saw whiteness creep up under his skin. "What year is this?"

We gaped at him. "Well, it's the second year after the great salmon catch," I tried.

"What year after Christ, I mean?" It was a hoarse prayer.

"Oh, so you are a Christian? Hm, let me think. . . . I talked with a bishop in England once, we were holding him for ransom, and he said . . . let me see . . . I think he said this Christ man lived a thousand years ago, or maybe a little less."

"A thousand —" He shook his head; and then something went out of him, he stood with glassy eyes — yes, I have seen glass, I told you I am a traveled man — he stood thus, and when we led him toward the garth he went like a small child.

You can see for yourself, priest, that my wife Ragnhild is still good to look upon even in eld, and Thorgunna took after her. She was — is tall and slim, with a dragon's hoard of golden hair. She being a maiden then, it flowed loose over her shoulders. She had great blue eyes and a small heart-shaped face and very red lips. Withal she was a merry one, and kind-hearted, so that all men loved her. Sverri Snorrason went in viking when she refused him and was slain, but no one had the wit to see that she was unlucky.

We led this Gerald Samsson — when I asked, he said his father was named Sam — we led him home, leaving Sigurd and Grim to finish gathering the driftwood. There are some who would not have a Christian in their house, for fear of witchcraft, but I am a broad-minded man and Helgi, of course, was wild for anything new. Our guest stumbled like a blind man over the fields, but seemed to wake up as we entered the yard. His eyes went around the buildings that enclosed it, from the stables and sheds to the smokehouse, the brewery, the kitchen, the bath house, the god-shrine, and thence to the hall. And Thorgunna was standing in the doorway.

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Their gazes locked for a moment, and I saw her color but thought little of it then. Our shoes rang on the flagging as we crossed the yard and kicked the dogs aside. My two thralls paused in cleaning out the stables to gawp, until I got them back to work with the remark that a man good for naught else was always a pleasing sacrifice. That's one useful practice you Christians lack; I've never made a human offering myself, but you know not how helpful is the fact that I could do so.

We entered the hall and I told the folk Gerald's name and how we had found him. Ragnhild set her maids hopping, to stoke up the fire in the middle trench and fetch beer, while I led Gerald to the high seat and sat down by him. Thorgunna brought us the filled horns.

Gerald tasted the brew and made a face. I felt somewhat offended, for my beer is reckoned good, and asked him if there was aught wrong. He laughed with a harsh note and said no, but he was used to beer that foamed and was not sour.

"And where might they make such?" I wondered testily.

"Everywhere. Iceland, too — no . . ." He stared emptily before him. "Let's say . . . in Vinland."

"Where is Vinland?" I asked.

"The country to the west whence I came. I thought you knew . . . wait a bit." He shook his head. "Maybe I can find out — Have you heard of a man named Leif Eiriksson?"

"No," I said. Since then it has struck me that this was one proof of his tale, for Leif Eiriksson is now a well-known chief; and I also take more seriously those tales of land seen by Bjarni Herjulfsson.

"His father, maybe — Eirik the Red?" asked Gerald.

"Oh, yes," I said. "If you mean the Norseman who came hither because of a manslaughter, and left Iceland in turn for the same reason, and has now settled with other folk in Greenland."

"Then this is . . . a little before Leif's voyage," he muttered. "The late tenth century."

"See here," demanded Helgi, "we've been patient with you, but this is no time for riddles. We save those for feasts and drinking bouts. Can you not say plainly whence you come and how you got here?"

Gerald covered his face, shaking.

"Let the man alone, Helgi," said Thorgunna. "Can you not see he's troubled?"

He raised his head and gave her the look of a hurt dog that someone has patted. It was dim in the hall, enough light coming in by the loft-windows so no candles were lit, but not enough to see well by. Nevertheless, I marked a reddening in both their faces.

Gerald drew a long breath and fumbled about; his clothes were made with pockets. He brought out a small parchment box and from it took a little white stick that he put in his mouth. Then he took out

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another box, and a wooden stick from it which burst into flame when scratched. With the fire he kindled the stick in his mouth, and sucked in the smoke.

We all stared. "Is that a Christian rite?" asked Helgi.

"No . . . not just so." A wry, disappointed smile twisted his lips. "I'd have thought you'd be more surprised, even terrified."

"It's something new," I admitted, "but we're a sober folk on Iceland. Those fire-sticks could be useful. Did you come to trade in them?"

"Hardly." He sighed. The smoke he breathed in seemed to steady him, which was odd, because the smoke in the hall had made him cough and water at the eyes. "The truth is . . . something you will not believe. I can scarce believe it myself."

We waited. Thorgunna stood leaning forward, her lips parted.

"That lightning bolt —" Gerald nodded wearily. "I was out in the storm, and somehow the lightning must have struck me in just the right way, a way that happens only once in many thousands of times. It threw me back into the past."

Those were his words, priest. I did not understand, and told him so.

"It's hard to see," he agreed. "God give that I'm only dreaming. But if this is a dream, I must endure till I wake up . . . well, look. I was born one thousand, nine hundred and thirty-two years after Christ, in a land to the west which you have not yet found. In the twenty-third year of my life, I was in Iceland as part of my country's army. The lightning struck me, and now . . . now it is less than one thousand years after Christ, and yet I am here — almost a thousand years before I was born, I am here!"

We sat very still. I signed myself with the Hammer and took a long pull from my horn. One of the maids whimpered, and Ragnhild whispered so fiercely I could hear. "Be still. The poor fellow's out of his head. There's no harm in him."

I agreed with her, though less sure of the last part of it. The gods can speak through a madman, and the gods are not always to be trusted. Or he could turn berserker, or he could be under a heavy curse that would also touch us.

He sat staring before him, and I caught a few fleas and cracked them while I thought about it. Gerald noticed and asked with some horror if we had many fleas here.

"Why, of course," said Thorgunna. "Have you none?"

"No." He smiled crookedly. "Not yet."

"Ah," she sighed, "you *must* be sick."

She was a level-headed girl. I saw her thought, and so did Ragnhild and Helgi. Clearly, a man so sick that he had no fleas could be expected to rave. There was still some worry about whether we might catch the illness, but I deemed it unlikely; his trouble was all in the head,

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perhaps from a blow he had taken. In any case, the matter was come down to earth now, something we could deal with.

As a godi, a chief who holds sacrifices, it behooved me not to turn a stranger out. Moreover, if he could fetch in many of those little fire-kindling sticks, a profitable trade might be built up. So I said Gerald should go to bed. He protested, but we manhandled him into the shut-bed and there he lay tired and was soon asleep. Thorgunna said she would take care of him.

The next day I decided to sacrifice a horse, both because of the timber we had found and to take away any curse there might be on Gerald. Furthermore, the beast I had picked was old and useless, and we were short of fresh meat. Gerald had spent the day lounging moodily around the garth, but when I came in to supper I found him and my daughter laughing.

"You seem to be on the road to health," I said.

"Oh, yes. It . . . could be worse for me." He sat down at my side as the carles set up the trestle table and the maids brought in the food. "I was ever much taken with the age of the vikings, and I have some skills."

"Well," I said, "if you've no home, we can keep you here for a while."

"I can work," he said eagerly. "I'll be worth my pay."

Now I knew he was from a far land, because what chief would work on any land but his own, and for hire at that? Yet he had the easy manner of the high-born, and had clearly eaten well all his life. I overlooked that he had made no gifts; after all, he was shipwrecked.

"Maybe you can get passage back to your United States," said Helgi. "We could hire a ship. I'm fain to see that realm."

"No," said Gerald bleakly. "There is no such place. Not yet."

"So you still hold to that idea you came from tomorrow?" grunted Sigurd. "Crazy notion. Pass the pork."

"I do," said Gerald. There was a calm on him now. "And I can prove it."

"I don't see how you speak our tongue, if you come from so far away," I said. I would not call a man a liar to his face, unless we were swapping brags in a friendly way, but . . .

"They speak otherwise in my land and time," he replied, "but it happens that in Iceland the tongue changed little since the old days, and I learned it when I came there."

"If you are a Christian," I said, "you must bear with us while we sacrifice tonight."

"I've naught against that," he said. "I fear I never was a very good Christian. I'd like to watch. How is it done?"

I told him how I would smite the horse with a hammer before the god,

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and cut its throat, and sprinkle the blood about with willow twigs; thereafter we would butcher the carcass and feast. He said hastily:

"There's my chance to prove what I am. I have a weapon that will kill the horse with . . . with a flash of lightning."

"What is it?" I wondered. We all crowded around while he took the metal club out of its sheath and showed it to us. I had my doubts; it looked well enough for hitting a man, perhaps, but had no edge, though a wondrously skillful smith had forged it. "Well, we can try," I said.

He showed us what else he had in his pockets. There were some coins of remarkable roundness and sharpness, a small key, a stick with lead in it for writing, a flat purse holding many bits of marked paper; when he told us solemnly that some of this paper was money, even Thorgunna had to laugh. Best of all was a knife whose blade folded into the handle. When he saw me admiring that, he gave it to me, which was well done for a shipwrecked man. I said I would give him clothes and a good ax, as well as lodging for as long as needful.

No, I don't have the knife now. You shall hear why. It's a pity, for it was a good knife, though rather small.

"What were you ere the war-arrow went out in your land?" asked Helgi. "A merchant?"

"No," said Gerald. "I was an . . . *engineer* . . . that is, I was learning how to be one. That's a man who builds things, bridges and roads and tools . . . more than just an artisan. So I think my knowledge could be of great value here." I saw a fever in his eyes. "Yes, give me time and I'll be a king!"

"We have no king in Iceland," I grunted. "Our forefathers came hither to get away from kings. Now we meet at the Things to try suits and pass new laws, but each man must get his own redress as best he can."

"But suppose the man in the wrong won't yield?" he asked.

"Then there can be a fine feud," said Helgi, and went on to relate with sparkling eyes some of the killings there had lately been. Gerald looked unhappy and fingered his *gun*. That is what he called his fire-spitting club.

"Your clothing is rich," said Thorgunna softly. "Your folk must own broad acres at home."

"No," he said, "our . . . our king gives every man in the army clothes like these. As for my family, we owned no land, we rented our home in a building where many other families also dwelt."

I am not purse-proud, but it seemed me he had not been honest, a landless man sharing my high seat like a chief. Thorgunna covered my huffiness by saying. "You will gain a farm later."

After dark we went out to the shrine. The carles had built a fire

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before it, and as I opened the door the wooden Odin appeared to leap forth. Gerald muttered to my daughter that it was a clumsy bit of carving, and since my father had made it I was still more angry with him. Some folks have no understanding of the fine arts.

Nevertheless, I let him help me lead the horse forth to the altar stone. I took the blood-bowl in my hands and said he could now slay the beast if he would. He drew his gun, put the end behind the horse's ear, and squeezed. There was a crack, and the beast quivered and dropped with a hole blown through its skull, wasting the brains — a clumsy weapon. I caught a whiff of smell, sharp and bitter like that around a volcano. We all jumped, one of the women screamed, and Gerald looked proud. I gathered my wits and finished the rest of the sacrifice as usual. Gerald did not like having blood sprinkled over him, but then, of course, he was a Christian. Nor would he take more than a little of the soup and flesh.

Afterward Helgi questioned him about the gun, and he said it could kill a man at bowshot distance but there was no witchcraft in it, only use of some tricks we did not know as yet. Having heard of the Greek fire, I believed him. A *gun* could be useful in a fight, as indeed I was to learn, but it did not seem very practical — iron costing what it does, and months of forging needed for each one.

I worried more about the man himself.

And the next morning I found him telling Thorgunna a great deal of foolishness about his home, buildings as tall as mountains and wagons that flew or went without horses. He said there were eight or nine thousand thousands of folk in his city, a burgh called New Jorvik or the like. I enjoy a good brag as well as the next man, but this was too much and I told him gruffly to come along and help me get in some strayed cattle.

After a day scrambling around the hills I knew well enough that Gerald could scarce tell a cow's prow from her stern. We almost had the strays once, but he ran stupidly across their path and turned them so the work was all to do again. I asked him with strained courtesy if he could milk, shear, wield scythe or flail, and he said no, he had never lived on a farm.

"That's a pity," I remarked, "for everyone on Iceland does, unless he be outlawed."

He flushed at my tone. "I can do enough else," he answered. "Give me some tools and I'll show you metalwork well done."

That brightened me, for truth to tell, none of our household was a very gifted smith. "That's an honorable trade," I said, "and you can be of great help. I have a broken sword and several bent spearheads to be mended, and it were no bad idea

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to shoe all the horses." His admission that he did know how to put on a shoe was not very dampening to me then.

We had returned home as we talked, and Thorgunna came angrily forward. "That's no way to treat a guest, father!" she said. "Making him work like a carle, indeed!"

Gerald smiled. "I'll be glad to work," he said. "I need a . . . a stake . . . something to start me afresh. Also, I want to repay a little of your kindness."

That made me mild toward him, and I said it was not his fault they had different customs in the United States. On the morrow he could begin work in the smithy, and I would pay him, yet he would be treated as an equal since craftsmen are valued. This earned him black looks from the housefolk.

That evening he entertained us well with stories of his home; true or not, they made good listening. However, he had no real polish, being unable to compose even two lines of verse. They must be a raw and backward lot in the United States. He said his task in the army had been to keep order among the troops. Helgi said this was unheard-of, and he must be a brave man who would offend so many men, but Gerald said folk obeyed him out of fear of the king. When he added that the term of a levy in the United States was two years, and that men could be called to war even in harvest time, I said he was well out of a country with so ruthless and powerful a king.

"No," he answered wistfully, "we are a free folk, who say what we please."

"But it seems you may not do as you please," said Helgi.

"Well," he said, "we may not murder a man just because he offends us."

"Not even if he has slain your own kin?" asked Helgi.

"No. It is for the . . . the king to take vengeance on behalf of us all."

I chuckled. "Your yarns are good," I said, "but there you've hit a snag. How could the king even keep track of all the murders, let alone avenge them? Why, the man wouldn't even have time to beget an heir!"

He could say no more for all the laughter that followed.

The next day Gerald went to the smithy, with a thrall to pump the bellows for him. I was gone that day and night, down to Reykjavik to dicker with Hjalmar Broadnose about some sheep. I invited him back for an overnight stay, and we rode into the garth with his son Ketill, a red-haired sulky youth of twenty winters who had been refused by Thorgunna.

I found Gerald sitting gloomily on a bench in the hall. He wore the clothes I had given him, his own having been spoiled by ash and sparks — what had he awaited, the

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fool? He was talking in a low voice with my daughter.

"Well," I said as I entered, "how went it?"

My man Grim snickered. "He has ruined two spearheads, but we put out the fire he started ere the whole smithy burned."

"How's this?" I cried. "I thought you said you were a smith."

Gerald stood up, defiantly. "I worked with other tools, and better ones, at home," he replied. "You do it differently here."

It seemed he had built up the fire too hot; his hammer had struck everywhere but the place it should; he had wrecked the temper of the steel through not knowing when to quench it. Smithcraft takes years to learn, of course, but he should have admitted he was not even an apprentice.

"Well," I snapped, "what can you do, then, to earn your bread?" It irked me to be made a fool of before Hjalmar and Ketill, whom I had told about the stranger.

"Odin alone knows," said Grim. "I took him with me to ride after your goats, and never have I seen a worse horseman. I asked him if he could even spin or weave, and he said no."

"That was no question to ask a man!" flared Thorgunna. "He should have slain you for it!"

"He should indeed," laughed Grim. "But let me carry on the tale. I thought we would also repair your bridge over the foss. Well, he can just barely handle a saw, but he nearly took his own foot off with the adze."

"We don't use those tools, I tell you!" Gerald doubled his fists and looked close to tears.

I motioned my guests to sit down. "I don't suppose you can butcher a hog or smoke it either," I said.

"No." I could scarce hear him.

"Well, then, man . . . what *can* you do?"

"I —" He could get no words out.

"You were a warrior," said Thorgunna.

"Yes — that I was!" he said, his face kindling.

"Small use in Iceland when you have no other skills," I grumbled, "but perhaps, if you can get passage to the eastlands, some king will take you in his guard." Myself I doubted it, for a guardsman needs manners that will do credit to his master; but I had not the heart to say so.

Ketill Hjalmarsson had plainly not liked the way Thorgunna stood close to Gerald and spoke for him. Now he sneered and said: "I might even doubt your skill in fighting."

"That I have been trained for," said Gerald grimly.

"Will you wrestle with me, then?" asked Ketill.

"Gladly!" spat Gerald.

Priest, what is a man to think? As I grow older, I find life to be less and less the good-and-evil, black-and-white thing you say it is; we are all of us some hue of gray. This useless fellow, this spiritless lout who could

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even be asked if he did women's work and not lift ax, went out in the yard with Ketill Hjalmarsson and threw him three times running. There was some trick he had of grabbing the clothes as Ketill charged. . . . I called a stop when the youth was nearing murderous rage, praised them both, and filled the beer-horns. But Ketill brooded sullenly on the bench all evening.

Gerald said something about making a gun like his own. It would have to be bigger, a *cannon* he called it, and could sink ships and scatter armies. He would need the help of smiths, and also various stuffs. Charcoal was easy, and sulfur could be found in the volcano country, I suppose, but what is this saltpeter?

Also, being suspicious by now, I questioned him closely as to how he would make such a thing. Did he know just how to mix the powder? No, he admitted. What size would the gun have to be? When he told me — at least as long as a man — I laughed and asked him how a piece that size could be cast or bored, even if we could scrape together that much iron. This he did not know either.

"You haven't the tools to make the tools to make the tools," he said. I don't know what he meant by that. "God help me, I can't run through a thousand years of history all by myself."

He took out the last of his little smoke-sticks and lit it. Helgi had tried a puff earlier and gotten sick, though he remained a friend of Gerald's. Now my son proposed to take a boat in the morning and go up to Ice Fjord, where I had some money outstanding I wanted to collect. Hjalmar and Ketill said they would come along for the trip, and Thorgunna pleaded so hard that I let her come along too.

"An ill thing," muttered Sigurd. "All men know the land-trolls like not a woman aboard a ship. It's unlucky."

"How did your fathers ever bring women to this island?" I grinned.

Now I wish I had listened to him. He was not a clever man, but he often knew whereof he spoke.

At this time I owned a half-share in a ship that went to Norway, bartering wadmal for timber. It was a profitable business until she ran afoul of vikings during the disorders while Olaf Tryggvason was overthrowing Jarl Haakon there. Some men will do anything to make a living — thieves, cutthroats, they ought to be hanged, the worthless robbers pouncing on honest merchantmen. Had they any courage or honesty they would go to Ireland, which is full of plunder.

Well, anyhow, the ship was abroad, but we had three boats and took one of these. Besides myself, Thorgunna, and Helgi, Hjalmar and Ketill went along, with Grim and Gerald. I saw how the stranger winced at the cold water as we launched her, and afterward took off

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his shoes and stockings to let his feet dry. He had been surprised to learn we had a bath house — did he think us savages? — but still, he was dainty as a woman and soon moved upwind of our feet.

There was a favoring breeze, so we raised mast and sail. Gerald tried to help, but of course did not know one line from another and got them tangled. Grim snarled at him and Ketill laughed nastily. But erelong we were under weigh, and he came and sat by me where I had the steering oar.

He had plainly lain long awake thinking, and now he ventured timidly: "In my land they have . . . will have a rig and rudder which are better than this. With them, you can criss-cross against the wind."

"Ah, so now our skilled sailor must give us redes!" sneered Ketill.

"Be still," said Thorgunna sharply. "Let Gerald speak."

He gave her a shy look of thanks, and I was not unwilling to listen. "This is something which could easily be made," he said. "I've used such boats myself, and know them well. First, then, the sail should not be square and hung from a yard-arm, but three-cornered, with the third corner lashed to a yard swiveling from the mast. Then, your steering oar is in the wrong place — there should be a rudder in the middle of the stern, guided by a bar." He was eager now, tracing the plan with his fingernail on Thorgunna's cloak. "With these two things, and a deep keel — going down to about the height of a man for a boat this size — a ship can move across the path of the wind . . . so. And another sail can be hung between the mast and the prow."

Well, priest, I must say the idea had its merits, and were it not for fear of bad luck — for everything of his was unlucky — I might even now play with it. But there are clear drawbacks, which I pointed out to him in a reasonable way.

"First and worst," I said, "this rudder and deep keel would make it all but impossible to beach the ship or sail up a shallow river. Perhaps they have many harbors where you hail from, but here a craft must take what landings she can find, and must be speedily launched if there should be an attack. Second, this mast of yours would be hard to unstep when the wind dropped and oars came out. Third, the sail is the wrong shape to stretch as an awning when one must sleep at sea."

"The ship could lie out, and you could go to land in a small boat," he said. "Also, you could build cabins aboard for shelter."

"The cabins would get in the way of the oars," I said, "unless the ship were hopelessly broad-beamed or unless the oarsmen sat below a deck like the galley slaves of Miklagard; and free men would not endure rowing in such foulness."

"Must you have oars?" he asked like a very child.

Laughter barked along the hull.

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Even the gulls hovering to starboard, where the shore rose darkly, mewed their scorn. "Do they also have tame winds in the place whence you came?" snorted Hjalmar. "What happens if you're becalmed — for days, maybe, with provisions running out —"

"You could build a ship big enough to carry many weeks' provisions," said Gerald.

"If you had the wealth of a king, you could," said Helgi. "And such a king's ship, lying helpless on a flat sea, would be swarmed by every viking from here to Jomsborg. As for leaving the ship out on the water while you make camp, what would you have for shelter, or for defense if you should be trapped there?"

Gerald slumped. Thorgunna said to him, gently: "Some folk have no heart to try anything new. I think it's a grand idea."

He smiled at her, a weary smile, and plucked up the will to say something about a means for finding north even in cloudy weather — he said there were stones which always pointed north when hung by a string. I told him kindly that I would be most interested if he could find me some of this stone; or if he knew where it was to be had, I could ask a trader to fetch me a piece. But this he did not know, and fell silent. Ketill opened his mouth, but got such an edged look from Thorgunna that he shut it again; his looks declared plainly enough what a liar he thought Gerald to be.

The wind turned contrary after a while, so we lowered the mast and took to the oars. Gerald was strong and willing, though clumsy; however, his hands were so soft that erelong they bled. I offered to let him rest, but he kept doggedly at the work.

Watching him sway back and forth, under the dreary creak of the tholes, the shaft red and wet where he gripped it, I thought much about him. He had done everything wrong which a man could do — thus I imagined then, not knowing the future — and I did not like the way Thorgunna's eyes strayed to him and rested there. He was no man for my daughter, landless and penniless and helpless. Yet I could not keep from liking him. Whether his tale was true or only a madness, I felt he was honest about it; and surely there was something strange about the way he had come. I noticed the cuts on his chin from my razor; he had said he was not used to our kind of shaving and would grow a beard. He had tried hard. I wondered how well I would have done, landing alone in this witch country of his dreams, with a gap of forever between me and my home.

Perhaps that same misery was what had turned Thorgunna's heart. Women are a kittle breed, priest, and you who leave them alone belike understand them as well as I who have slept with half a hundred in six different lands. I do not think they even understand themselves. Birth

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and life and death, those are the great mysteries, which none will ever fathom, and a woman is closer to them than a man.

— The ill wind stiffened, the sea grew iron gray and choppy under low leaden clouds, and our headway was poor. At sunset we could row no more, but must pull in to a small unpeopled bay and make camp as well as could be on the strand.

We had brought firewood along, and tinder. Gerald, though staggering with weariness, made himself useful, his little sticks kindling the blaze more easily than flint and steel. Thorgunna set herself to cook our supper. We were not warded by the boat from a lean, whining wind; her cloak fluttered like wings and her hair blew wild above the streaming flames. It was the time of light nights, the sky a dim dusky blue, the sea a wrinkled metal sheet and the land like something risen out of dream-mists. We men huddled in our cloaks, holding numbed hands to the fire and saying little.

I felt some cheer was needed, and ordered a cask of my best and strongest ale broached. An evil Norn made me do that, but no man escapes his weird. Our bellies seemed all the emptier now when our noses drank in the sputter of a spitted joint, and the ale went swiftly to our heads. I remember declaiming the death-song of Ragnar Hairybreeks for no other reason than that I felt like declaiming it.

Thorgunna came to stand over Gerald where he slumped. I saw how her fingers brushed his hair, ever so lightly, and Ketill Hjalmarsson did too. "Have they no verses in your land?" she asked.

"Not like yours," he said, looking up. Neither of them looked away again. "We sing rather than chant. I wish I had my *guitar* here — that's a kind of harp."

"Ah, an Irish bard!" said Hjalmar Broadnose.

I remember strangely well how Gerald smiled, and what he said in his own tongue, though I know not the meaning: "*Only on me mither's side, begorra.*" I suppose it was magic.

"Well, sing for us," asked Thorgunna.

"Let me think," he said. "I shall have to put it in Norse words for you." After a little while, staring up at her through the windy night, he began a song. It had a tune I liked, thus:

From this valley they tell me you're leaving,
I shall miss your bright eyes and sweet smile.
You will carry the sunshine with you,
That has brightened my life all the while. . . .

I don't remember the rest, except that it was not quite decent.

When he had finished, Hjalmar and Grim went over to see if the meat was done. I saw a glimmering of tears in my daughter's eyes. "That was a lovely thing," she said.

Ketill sat upright. The flames splashed his face with wild, running

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hues. There was a rawness in his tone: "Yes, we've found what this fellow can do: sit about and make pretty songs for the girls. Keep him for that, Ospak."

Thorgunna whitened, and Helgi clapped hand to sword. I saw how Gerald's face darkened, and his voice was thick: "That was no way to talk. Take it back."

Ketill stood up. "No," he said, "I'll ask no pardon of an idler living off honest yeomen."

He was raging, but had had sense enough to shift the insult from my family to Gerald alone. Otherwise he and his father would have had the four of us to deal with. As it was, Gerald stood up too, fists knotted at his sides, and said. "Will you step away from here and settle this?"

"Gladly!" Ketill turned and walked a few yards down the beach, taking his shield from the boat. Gerald followed. Thorgunna stood with stricken face, then picked up his ax and ran after him.

"Are you going weaponless?" she shrieked.

Gerald stopped, looking dazed. "I don't want that," he mumbled. "Fists —"

Ketill puffed himself up and drew sword. "No doubt you're used to fighting like thralls in your land," he said. "So if you'll crave my pardon, I'll let this matter rest."

Gerald stood with drooped shoulders. He stared at Thorgunna as if he were blind, as if asking her what to do. She handed him the ax.

"So you want me to kill him?" he whispered.

"Yes," she answered.

Then I knew she loved him, for otherwise why should she have cared if he disgraced himself?

Helgi brought him his helmet. He put it on, took the ax, and went forward.

"Ill is this," said Hjalmar to me. "Do you stand by the stranger, Ospak?"

"No," I said. "He's no kin or oath-brother of mine. This is not my quarrel."

"That's good," said Hjalmar. "I'd not like to fight with you, my friend. You were ever a good neighbor."

We went forth together and staked out the ground. Thorgunna told me to lend Gerald my sword, so he could use a shield too, but the man looked oddly at me and said he would rather have the ax. They squared away before each other, he and Ketill, and began fighting.

This was no holmgang, with rules and a fixed order of blows and first blood meaning victory. There was death between those two. Ketill rushed in with the sword whistling in his hand. Gerald sprang back, wielding the ax awkwardly. It bounced off Ketill's shield. The youth grinned and cut at Gerald's legs. I saw blood well forth and stain the ripped breeches.

It was murder from the beginning. Gerald had never used an ax before. Once he even struck with the flat of

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it. He would have been hewed down at once had Ketill's sword not been blunted on his helmet and had he not been quick on his feet. As it was, he was soon lurching with a dozen wounds.

"Stop the fight!" Thorgunna cried aloud and ran forth. Helgi caught her arms and forced her back, where she struggled and kicked till Grim must help. I saw grief on my son's face but a malicious grin on the carle's.

Gerald turned to look. Ketill's blade came down and slashed his left hand. He dropped the ax. Ketill snarled and readied to finish him. Gerald drew his gun. It made a flash and a barking noise. Ketill fell, twitched for a moment, and was quiet. His lower jaw was blown off and the back of his head gone.

There came a long stillness, where only the wind and the sea had voice.

Then Hjalmar trod forth, his face working but a cold steadiness over him. He knelt and closed his son's eyes, as token that the right of vengeance was his. Rising, he said. "That was an evil deed. For that you shall be outlawed."

"It wasn't magic," said Gerald in a numb tone. "It was like a . . . a bow. I had no choice. I didn't want to fight with more than my fists."

I trod between them and said the Thing must decide this matter, but that I hoped Hjalmar would take weregild for Ketill.

"But I killed him to save my own life!" protested Gerald.

"Nevertheless, weregild must be paid, if Ketill's kin will take it," I explained. "Because of the weapon, I think it will be doubled, but that is for the Thing to judge."

Hjalmar had many other sons, and it was not as if Gerald belonged to a family at odds with his own, so I felt he would agree. However, he laughed coldly and asked where a man lacking wealth would find the silver.

Thorgunna stepped up with a wintry calm and said we would pay it. I opened my mouth, but when I saw her eyes I nodded. "Yes, we will," I said, "in order to keep the peace."

"Then you make this quarrel your own?" asked Hjalmar.

"No," I answered. "This man is no blood of my own. But if I choose to make him a gift of money to use as he wishes, what of it?"

Hjalmar smiled. There was sorrow crinkled around his eyes, but he looked on me with old comradeship.

"Erelong this man may be your son-in-law," he said. "I know the signs, Ospak. Then indeed he will be of your folk. Even helping him now in his need will range you on his side."

"And so?" asked Helgi, most softly.

"And so, while I value your friendship, I have sons who will take the death of their brother ill. They'll want revenge on Gerald Samsson, if only for the sake of their good names, and thus our two houses will

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be sundered and one manslaying will lead to another. It has happened often enough erenow." Hjalmar sighed. "I myself wish peace with you, Ospak, but if you take this killer's side it must be otherwise."

I thought for a moment, thought of Helgi lying with his skull cloven, of my other sons on their garths drawn to battle because of a man they had never seen, I thought of having to wear byrnies every time we went down for driftwood and never knowing when we went to bed whether we would wake to find the house ringed in by spearmen.

"Yes," I said, "you are right, Hjalmar. I withdraw my offer. Let this be a matter between you and him alone."

We gripped hands on it.

Thorgunna gave a small cry and fled into Gerald's arms. He held her close. "What does this mean?" he asked slowly.

"I cannot keep you any longer," I said, "but belike some crofter will give you a roof. Hjalmar is a law-abiding man and will not harm you until the Thing has outlawed you. That will not be before midsummer. Perhaps you can get passage out of Iceland ere then."

"A useless one like me?" he replied bitterly.

Thorgunna whirled free and blazed that I was a coward and a perjurer and all else evil. I let her have it out, then laid my hands on her shoulders.

"It is for the house," I said. "The house and the blood, which are holy. Men die and women weep, but while the kindred live our names are remembered. Can you ask a score of men to die for your own hankerings?"

Long did she stand, and to this day I know not what her answer would have been. It was Gerald who spoke.

"No," he said. "I suppose you have right, Ospak . . . the right of your time, which is not mine." He took my hand, and Helgi's. His lips brushed Thorgunna's cheek. Then he turned and walked out into the darkness.

I heard, later, that he went to earth with Thorvald Hallsson, the crofter of Humpback Fell, and did not tell his host what had happened. He must have hoped to go unnoticed until he could arrange passage to the eastlands somehow. But of course word spread. I remember his brag that in the United States men had means to talk from one end of the land to another. So he must have looked down on us, sitting on our lonely garths, and not known how fast word could get around. Thorvald's son Hrolf went to Brand Sealskin-boots to talk about some matter, and of course mentioned the stranger, and soon all the western island had the tale.

Now if Gerald had known he must give notice of a manslaying at the first garth he found, he would have been safe at least till the Thing met,

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for Hjalmar and his sons are sober men who would not kill a man still under the protection of the law. But as it was, his keeping the matter secret made him a murderer and therefore at once an outlaw. Hjalmar and his kin rode up to Humpback Fell and haled him forth. He shot his way past them with the *gun* and fled into the hills. They followed him, having several hurts and one more death to avenge. I wonder if Gerald thought the strangeness of his weapon would unnerve us. He may not have known that every man dies when his time comes, neither sooner nor later, so that fear of death is useless.

At the end, when they had him trapped, his weapon gave out on him. Then he took up a dead man's sword and defended himself so valiantly that Ulf Hjalmarsson has limped ever since. It was well done, as even his foes admitted; they are an eldritch race in the United States, but they do not lack manhood.

When he was slain, his body was brought back. For fear of the ghost, he having perhaps been a warlock, it was burned, and all he had owned was laid in the fire with him. That was where I lost the knife he had given me. The barrow stands out on the moor, north of here, and folk shun it though the ghost has not walked. Now, with so much else happening, he is slowly being forgotten.

And that is the tale, priest, as I saw it and heard it. Most men think Gerald Samsson was crazy, but I myself believe he did come from out of time, and that his doom was that no man may ripen a field before harvest season. Yet I look into the future, a thousand years hence, when they fly through the air and ride in horseless wagons and smash whole cities with one blow. I think of this Iceland then, and of the young United States men there to help defend us in a year when the end of the world hovers close. Perhaps some of them, walking about on the heaths, will see that barrow and wonder what ancient warrior lies buried there, and they may even wish they had lived long ago in his time when men were free.

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Now comes in, for millions of Americans, the only true sports season of the year, when one can forget the eight-to-the-ton behemoths of football and the seven-foot mutants of basketball and turn to the heroes of normal human proportions who play baseball. To celebrate the opening of Major League play, F&SF presents a realistically thought-through story of baseball on Mars, where low gravity and thin atmosphere combine to frustrate Earth's finest players . . . but where a great hitter can still be great — with the proper inspiration.

Star Slugger

by WILLIAM MORRISON

ON OUR OWN PLANET WE WERE *World Champs. Here*, thought Hack Sawyer, *we can't even beat a pickup team.* Or as Gashouse Garson put it while awaiting his turn, swinging half a dozen bats like so many toothpicks: "We shoulda stood in bed — on Oith."

He's right, thought Hack, while crouching at the plate. *Take me, for instance. I feel fine. My collar bone doesn't hurt any more, my trick knee stopped doing tricks, my sore arm stopped being sore at the rest of me. For an old man of thirty-two I'm in good condition. And if I had sore eyes — looking at that girl out there would cure them. But I can't get a hit. I lead the league two years out of three, and when I have a bad season, like last year, I sink no lower than .347 — and I don't know what you have to do to the ball to get on base in this overgrown copter parking lot!*

The opposing pitcher began his windup. Hack's crouch grew deeper, and his muscles tensed. As the ball left the pitcher's hand, he saw, out of the corner of one eye, high up over the infield, one of the faint flashes he had noticed from time to time. Then the ball was upon him.

It was a straight pitch, shoulder high and not too fast, and he hit it smack on the nose. There was a sharp crack, clearly audible even in the thin air of this crazy place, and the ball shot forward for almost a hundred yards on what seemed like a straight line skyward, before the low gravity could begin pulling it into a perceptible curve. It went seven hundred feet, reached the top of its course, and began to come

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slowly down again. At the thousand foot mark it did what it had done before — bounced off the wall and into the glove that waited for it. *A girl's glove*, Hack noted. He dropped his bat — he still couldn't get used to the slow way it fell — and walked dejectedly back to the bench.

There had been a spattering of applause as the fielder caught the ball. It was the politest crowd Hack had ever seen at a ball game. Why didn't they talk it up? *Here they are*, he thought, *watching their sandlot-type team beat the World Champs, and all you hear is, "Well played, old bean." That's what you might call typical Martian reserve. I'd feel better if they tried to give me a couple of razzberries. Maybe I'd get sore enough then to buy myself a hit.*

Gashouse, batting next, had selected his weapon and was striding to the plate. Somebody said, "If he gets on base, it'll be a miracle."

"You don't count on no miracles in this game," said Charlie Marke, known during his twenty-year career as manager by the name of Easy, for the same reason a fat man may be called Slim. "You go up there and powder that ball. That's how you get on base."

"We've been hitting it, Easy," said Chuck Malevski, the third baseman. "Take Hack, f'rinstance. He's been laying wood on that ball every time up."

"He don't hit it in the right places."

"There ain't no right places. The ball goes up so high and comes down so slow, the fielders have all the time in the world to get under it. Or else it bounces off the wall someplace. Why, we've been hitting what would be homers in any real ball park. Here they're just outs."

"Then hit it *past* them. Take a look at that other bunch. They ain't doin' so bad. Four runs in five innings. Off Johnny, too. And they tell me Johnny's my best pitcher." Big Johnny Kirk looked none too happy at being brought into the conversation. "Even the girl got a hit offn him."

Gashouse, watching a ball go by, pounded the plate fiercely, and looked a little disconcerted as the bat bounced unexpectedly into the air.

Johnny Kirk said, "If you want to take me out, Easy, it's all right with me."

"Take you out? Who am I gonna put in your place? Vic? He throws curves, and the air in this place is so thin the ball won't curve right. Louie's fast ball would be OK, except he can't put it where he wants. This here low gravity they got messes him up. No, Johnny, I need a man with control. You're it."

"My control isn't so good today."

"It ain't been so bad the last coupla innings. Only one run. The real trouble is, *we* ain't hittin'."

At the plate, Gashouse, who had watched another ball go by and swung vainly at a strike, shifted the position of his feet.

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"Gashouse ain't no bunter," said Corbin, the shortstop. "What's he gonna bunt for?"

"Leave him," growled Easy. "He can't do no worse than you fellows do when you swing."

The ball came shooting toward the plate, and Gashouse stuck his bat out. On Earth his effort would have earned him a base hit. Here it didn't even come close. Instead of rolling, the ball bounced up into the hands of the opposing pitcher, who began to whirl even before he caught it, and threw to first base. Gashouse would have been out anyway. To make matters worse, the long strides he found himself taking made him overrun first base, and he didn't know how to turn in the air quickly enough to get back.

As he found his seat on the bench again, Gashouse was in a bad humor. "I'da been safe," he growled. "Only it's too far to foist base."

"It's too far from the pitcher's mound to the plate too," said Johnny Kirk.

"That crazy sun," said Phil Manio, the left fielder. "It don't give enough light, and it's so little most of the time you don't know it's there. But when it gets in your eyes, it's worse than on Earth."

"Them meteorlights too," said Gashouse. "They make it hard to keep your eye on the ball."

"Stop crabbin'," said Easy. "The sun and the meteorlights we can't do nothin' about. But this here infield, now — well, it's gotta be big, and so has the outfield. The air bein' so thin here, it hardly don't slow the ball down none. The pitcher throws a fast one, and it comes at you like it just left his hand. Or a feller hits a hard one down to third, and it would kill you if you didn't have time to get set for it. Don't you guys start complainin' about the size of the park. We can't change that nohow, and it's the same size park for both teams. Just go out and get them hits, like the other side's doin'."

Malevski promptly went out, poled a long ball to left field, and watched it carom off the wall into the hands of the fielder.

The Martian team trotted in, heads up. The team from Earth moved slowly out.

As he passed the girl again, Hack thought, *Best-looking outfielder I ever saw. I wish* — He said aloud, "Nice catch you made."

She colored slightly. "Thank you, but that was nothing at all. Those that bounce off the wall are always the easiest to handle."

"Not for us," said Hack.

"That's because you haven't had time to become accustomed to them. You should have arrived on Mars at least a week before the game. If your ship hadn't been late, you'd have had no trouble at all. That would have been very unfortunate for us."

Polite enough, he thought. *They're all of them so polite I'm not sure this game we're playing is baseball.*

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Only, with her I think it's more than just politeness. Maybe I'm crazy, but I think she likes me.

She smiled as she left him, and Hack couldn't help looking after her. *There's something about the way she carries herself I've never seen in a girl before. It may be the low gravity. That makes it easier to keep your head up. Or maybe it's just being away from Earth, free from all the things that weigh us down there. These dames on Mars — they all move so proud, the way queens were once supposed to move on Earth.*

They were throwing the ball around now, and as he watched, one got away from Ken Kravo, the second baseman. It sailed into center field, where Hack himself picked it up, and threw it back. Ken was a fine fielder, and an error by him was a rare thing. But he hadn't adjusted yet either. All his reflexes had been conditioned on Earth, where the ball didn't come at you straight as it did here, where your muscles always had to fight the pull of gravity and didn't know what to do with themselves when that pull was weakened, as it was on Mars. Now Ken was uneasy and unsure of himself, and you could tell it by the uncertain way in which he moved.

And whatever Easy might say, the size of the playing field did make a difference. It slowed up the game, nullified the value of quick reflexes and powerful muscles, and gave the advantage to the local team, which knew its way around. You hit a fly, and it went up and up, giving the outfielder all the time in the world to gather it in. And when you rapped out a real long one, that wall pushed it right back at you.

That wall, thought Hack, *that's the thing that makes the difference between us. If not for that, we got so much power, we'd blast them out of the park. But we can't blast that wall. It's strong, because it stands there without support, and it goes pretty high up. It's over the whole ball park like a big eggshell. Like some giant slit it in half and dropped it down over us poor bugs running around inside.*

Excuse me — it's like two eggshells. One inside the other. The meteorites light up when they hit the outside one. Even if they tear a hole in it, they get slowed down enough so that they don't smash the inside one. And in less than a second, the outside shell seals itself. Smart idea. Wonder what it's made of. Not steel, or any other metal I know, because you can see through it as if it wasn't there. Probably a kind of metal plastic. It keeps the air inside the park instead of letting it out to scatter all over the surface of Mars. It's too bad they had to build the park separately, instead of as part of the nearby town, but that's the way the engineers planned it. Wonder if they planned it that way for us to lose this game. Do engineers look forward that far?

The opposing pitcher came to the plate. The batter was more than an

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eighth of a mile from where Hack stood in center field, but Hack's eyes were good, and he recognized the man. Johnny Kirk had some of his confidence back, for he was throwing one strike after another. The third pitch the batter fouled off. The next one he hit straight at Malevski, who stretched out his glove, stopped the ball, juggled it for half a second, and then caught it with a desperate lunge as it was falling slowly to the ground.

The girl was up next. "K. Blake," read the batting order. The Champs had supposed, if they thought of it at all, that K. stood for something like Karl or Kaspar. It had been a surprise, and for most of them an unpleasant one, to find that it was short for Kay.

It hadn't been unpleasant for Hack, though. Not at first, anyway. He liked the way she looked and the way she carried herself, and the thought had entered his mind, for the first time, *There's the girl for me.* He hadn't been aware, then, of how good a player she was.

He had realized some of it when she caught one of those long flies off the wall, and he had realized more after her first time at bat, when she rapped out a well-placed single between second and third. And with the realization had come a certain stiffening of his attitude, a certain feeling of resentment. *I don't see myself, star centerfielder and league-leading slugger for the World Champs, going out with a girl who's a better player than I am. And so far, she's made me and the rest of the team look like monkeys.*

Look at the way she's waiting out Johnny, for instance. Johnny's throwing carefully, just missing the corners, but her eye is sharp, and she doesn't swing. She's got the count to three and nothing. Johnny has to give her a good one. He did! She's swinging — there goes the ball!

The ball had about stopped rising as it went over Corbin's head. Corbin could have knocked it down if he had made a quick enough leap for it, but he wasn't quite used yet, to the way you could go up in the air on Mars, and he didn't think about jumping until it was too late. Hack saw the ball coming in his direction, and he knew that at this distance, on Earth, it would make a couple of hops before getting to him. *But this isn't Earth. I still have time to make it if I get started.*

He started even before he finished thinking about it. *The way you run here is to keep your body low and throw yourself forward, not up. If you let yourself rise into the air, it's a long time before you come down again, and you move ahead slowly, sort of hopping along. If you keep close to the ground, you can use it to push yourself along.*

The ball was coming down as he got close to it, and Hack launched himself into a desperate dive. His glove got under the horsehide — they still called it that, though it was always made of plastic these

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days — just before it would have hit the ground, and then he was sliding forward on his face, while a murmur of applause rose in the stands.

Johnny Kirk, inspired by Hack's catch, struck the next man out, his fifth strikeout of the game. Then the Champs were going in to bat again. Hack took his time about it, waiting to talk to Kay again.

"That was a wonderful catch," she said, seeming almost pleased about it. "You robbed me of a hit."

"You did the same to me," said Hack.

"Mine was just ordinary. We've never seen fielding like yours before."

"Thanks," said Hack. "It would be nice to feel I deserved that."

Yes, he thought as he sat down, *I'd sure like to feel that we're playing like the world-beaters we're supposed to be. The way it is, we make all the fancy plays, and they get all the runs.*

In this upper half of the seventh inning, though, it began to look as if they might change all that. Phil Manio, the left fielder, was the first man up, and he drew a base on balls. After him, Bob Porter, the first baseman, rapped what should have been an easy out to the Martian shortstop. The shortstop's glove must have had a hole in it, because somehow the ball went through, and rolled into centerfield. Phil went to third on the play, Bob taking second.

Johnny Kirk, next man up, promptly struck out.

Two outs to go, thought Hack, as Corbin, head of the batting order, walked slowly to the plate. *It's the best chance we've had so far.*

Easy, agreeing with him, gave orders to hit it out.

On the first pitch, Corbin swung viciously.

The ball headed straight for center field. It wasn't traveling as fast or as high as the one Hack had smacked and the girl was running to keep up with it. Slowly it outpaced her, struck the wall near the ground, and bounced back, too low to be caught. *Two runs in*, thought Hack exultantly.

But Kay moved fast. She grabbed the ball, whirled around, and threw straight at third base. It got there on one hop, and Corbin, who had been setting out for second, turned back.

Kravo, after fouling off a series of strikes, drew a walk, and de Filippo, who followed him, hit into a double play that retired the side.

The Martians went out in order in their half of the seventh, and Hack was first man up again in the eighth. "Hit the ball down," said Easy. "Get it into the outfield on a bounce, and you're on base."

Hack nodded, and took his stand at the plate. The first pitch was a ball. The second would have been a strike, just below shoulder height. Hack chopped at it, and the ball shot like a streak past second base. There was no arc to it at all that Hack could see. He couldn't help

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thinking that on Earth it would have hit the ground and bounced long before it got into the outfield. Here it was still knee-high when Kay reached it and made the catch.

Garson was presented with a walk. Malevski fouled one back, and the opposing catcher took it off the wall. Phil Manio, trying to keep the ball down, as ordered, smacked it into the ground in front of the pitcher. It hopped over the latter's head and into the hands of the shortstop, who tossed it to first base for the out.

One more inning, thought Hack. *One last chance. My last chance. I like her, but if we lost this game, I wouldn't go out with her if she was the last girl on Earth or Mars. A man doesn't want his wife to be a better centerfielder than he is.*

Wife? I must be crazy, thinking about getting married. Right in the middle of a ball game. Only I can't ask her to marry me if we lose, just as the average man can't ask a rich girl to marry him. A man, especially if he's a ballplayer, has his pride.

To deepen his gloom, the Martian team scored in their half of the eighth. It was Kay who batted home the run.

Top of the ninth, thought Hack. *And they're three runs ahead.*

Porter, first man up, looked at Easy questioningly. "You want me to keep it down, Easy? I'm sort of getting on to how to swing in this low gravity."

Easy shook his head. "Too late for that. If we had time for a week's practice it would be different, but you try to figger out how to swing now, and you'll get yourself in a tangle. Like a centipede tryin' to figger out which leg to move next. Stop thinkin', pick out the good ones, and hit 'em the best you can."

"OK. Here goes."

Porter swung at the second pitch. The ball rose high, bounced off the wall in left field, and landed in the fielder's glove.

"Nice wallop," said Easy. "But that so-and-so wall—" Kirk was looking at him, and Easy said, "No more for you, Johnny. It's time for a pinch hitter."

Frank Popper, the pinch hitter, struck out. He came back from the plate white-faced, and said, "Sorry, Easy. That guy can't pitch. I don't know why I let him do that to me."

"My fault," said Easy. "I shoulda realized that you don't get used to how to bat in this place sittin' on the bench. I shoulda kept Johnny in. At least he's been practisin' swingin'." He nodded to Corbin. "Okay. Take your turn."

Corbin shocked every one by sending a slow grounder between first and second. It was the first real grounder the Champs had hit, and Corbin had reached second before the shortstop could chase after it and catch it.

"If he tried to hit one like that he couldn'ta done it," said Easy philosophically, as Kravo selected his bat. "Let's see what you can do."

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Kravo sent one over the third baseman's head. But the left fielder came tearing in, and Corbin had to hold at third, Kravo easily reaching first.

The Martian pitcher called time out, consulted with his catcher, and then began to throw carefully to de Filippo. He was flustered by now, and de Filippo wasn't an easy man to pitch to under the best of circumstances. The count reached three and two, and then a pitch into the dirt sent the batter to first base.

"Everything's up to you, Hack," said Easy. "If he's wild, give him a chance to walk you. If he ain't, you hit it."

Hack nodded.

The pitcher had called time out again. The infielders clustered around him, patting him on the back, and uttering words of encouragement. Then they resumed their positions, and the pitcher returned to the mound.

The first pitch had not too much speed, but it came straight for the plate, and Hack knew that whatever else happened, he was not going to be walked. *That's the way I want it,* he told himself, and got ready for the next one.

The pitcher checked his runners, and threw.

It was another strike, not quite over the center this time, and Hack swung. The ball skimmed down the foul side of the first base line, too fast to be handled. The umpire threw out a new ball.

Hack swallowed. The count was nothing and two, and the pitcher could afford to waste one. Or he could afford to try cutting the corner. It was even possible that he'd try to sneak a strike past the batter and end the game right there. Hack couldn't be sure of anything. He simply had to be on his toes.

The pitcher got the ball, shook his head at the catcher's first signal, then nodded. Out of the corner of his eye, Hack saw Corbin lead away from third.

Then the ball was coming straight at the plate, and with all the pent up power and anger that was in him, Hack swung at it. The ball didn't stay low, as it should have done. It rose. It rose even higher and faster than the one he had hit in the top of the sixth, and he knew that it would have even less chance to get away. The wall would stop it. It would hit high and fall slowly, and Kay would be there waiting for it.

All the same there was nothing to do but run. Corbin was already home, and Kravo and de Filippo rounded third in turn. *Too bad the runs wouldn't count,* he thought. Hack had already reached second when a great burst of light dazzled his eyes. *It's the sun. I must have caught it at the wrong angle — what's that explosion? The sun can't explode — not for a couple of million years yet! Whatever it is, don't stop —*

He heard a mighty roar — the first really loud yell of the game. *What happened to the ball? Did she*

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catch it? Or drop it? Tough luck for her — but it's time we got a break!

He almost stopped to look around, but Easy was going mad at third, waving him on, and he continued to run. He rounded third and headed for home with what seemed like the entire team escorting him. Only after he had crossed the plate did he turn to look towards the outfield.

Half the Martian team was staring up at the sky. The other half was clustered around one of the umpires, arguing.

Easy was pounding him on the back, and the rest of his teammates surrounded him, grinning.

"Right through the wall," said Gashouse. "I never seen a ball do nothin' like that before."

"Right through the inside wall," amended Johnny Kirk. "I guess the place must have been weakened by that meteor."

"I don't get it. You mean I hit the ball so hard —"

"You hit it hard enough, Hack," said Corbin. "But you ain't no wall-buster. Not by yourself, you ain't. But while the ball was ridin' higher an' higher, a big meteor comes crashin' through the outside shell — you seen the flash of light. The hole sealed itself up, like usual, but the meteor still had enough force left to put a dent in the inside shell. And just then, the ball you hit bangs against it — and goes through."

"Where is it now?"

Easy grinned. "It rolled between the two shells all the way to the ground, way over in the outfield. I guess it'll stay there for a while, because there ain't no good way to get it out. The Martians don't like what happened. They're tryin' to get your hit called a ground rule double, or something. But the head umpire called it a home run. And here, like on Oith, gettin' an umpire to change his mind calls for a bigger miracle than bustin' through a wall."

A home run it remained. The head umpire impressed that fact upon the Martians, and called, "Play ball."

The home team was so demoralized that the Champs scored two additional runs before the final out, and Vic Klein, who had replaced Johnny as pitcher, had no trouble sewing up the game with two strike-outs and an easy pop fly in the final half of the ninth.

After the showers — rather brief and unsatisfactory, for water was still in short supply on the entire planet — Hack sought out the most beautiful of his late opponents. She was wearing a dress instead of a baseball uniform, and was, Hack decided, the most wonderful sight on Mars.

"I'm sorry about what happened," he said, not sorry at all. "I guess you might call it a kind of fluke."

"You won honestly," she said, her eyes shining. "The ball went right *through* the wall."

"Well, I had a little help."

"With help or without it, no one

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on Mars ever hit a ball that hard before. Now we know why you're such a great player. The only thing we can't understand is why you hit only .347 last year."

I'll bet she knows my batting average for the past five years. Imagine that! And she doesn't mind her own team losing. Hack cleared his throat. "If that's the way you feel," he said, "maybe we can do a little talking about baseball tonight."

He watched her carefully.

"About baseball?" She seemed a little disappointed.

"Sure. We can talk about my batting average next year and the year after next. I think it's going to be kind of important — to both of us," said Hack.

EARTH	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	6	8
MARS	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	5

Coming Next Month

Our next issue, out around June 1, will feature two novelists: *The Dying Night*, latest, longest and most intricate of Isaac Asimov's science-fiction-detective-stories of Dr. Wendell Urth, and *The Silk and the Song*, a moving story of man's struggle toward freedom in an alien civilization, which marks the F&SF debut of the rising author Charles L. Fontenay. There'll be an article by J. Francis McComas on a new way of estimating our progress toward peacetime atomic power; new stories by Robert Abernathy, Idris Seabright and others; and some surprising reprint discoveries, including a delightful item by Arthur C. Clarke never published in a magazine or paperback, and an unflawed gem of fantasy by the topflight playwright-director, creator of BORN YESTERDAY, Garson Kanin.

NOTE OF EXPLANATION. The issue you're now reading is the one we promised, some months ago, would launch Alfred Bester's powerful new serial, THE BURNING SPEAR. But Mr. Bester was simultaneously attacked by some striking creative afterthoughts . . . and by a rash of urgent TV commitments which made it impossible to revise the novel immediately. We'll be bringing you THE BURNING SPEAR later on — and in a form even more exciting than when we announced it.

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Anyone can parody a bad writer; indeed, the task is hardly necessary — the original may be funnier than any parody. The true test of parodic skill is to attack greatness — to find the chinks in the armor and even to turn the armor inside out, plate by plate, revealing the comic absurdity which is inseparably welded to the champion's power. Thus have been born the masterpieces of parody: Swinburne on Tennyson, C. S. Calverley on Browning, A. P. Herbert on Shakespeare, John Riddell on Faulkner; and thus two relative newcomers to the profession have achieved, to my taste, the definitive parody of one of the three greatest names in modern science fiction. (And who will do a comparable job on Heinlein or Clarke?)

The Ship

by WILLIAM NOLAN & CHARLES FRITCH

UP, SHIP!

The great rocket *Fare Thee Well* rose on confettied legs of cinnamon fire and hot clove. Gleaming. Glowing. Shimmering. Ten thousand tons of sky-metal. Ten thousand hopes and prayers. Up. Up.

Up!

"Sir," said White, the first mate, in his British accent, "we're going —"

"Up!" finished the captain, smiling gently. His name was Black.

The visiscreen glowed green. Brown, the astrophysicist, said nothing.

The great skygiant shot upward. A star, an arrow, a lance, a spear, a dart, a needle, a pencil, a fire, a flame, an entire carnival, breathing, breathing on the Illinois air.

"Wine," said the captain, sighing. "Like old wine."

Up, ship, up! A cry from every throat, a sob, a whisper, a song, a prayer, an exultation, a stillness.

"It makes the tears come to your eyes," said Captain Ralph Black simply, sweating like a horse, a cow, a steer, a breath.

The stars swam by in a bowl of milk.

"I'm — " faltered astrologer's mate Blue, his voice strange.

"Sad?" finished Captain Black, bitterly. Then he added, lips drawn back over yellow teeth. "Aren't we all, Blue?"

The *Fare Thee Well* swept past the stars like a great fire balloon, the men inside sobbing and laughing

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all in one, each of them afraid, uncertain, like small children on their first Fourth of July picnic.

"Well," said Captain Ralph Black, nodding, looking at each of them in turn. "We're going —"

"Up!" finished the men in one crying voice. All the sadness of eternity was in that voice and all of the pumpkin kitchens that ever were. There was a smell like dry confetti in the air, a smell like old sauerkraut and tennis shoes worn and put away.

"Out there," Captain Black said, the taste of lemon meringue pie eaten at the age of twelve on a summer's porch in the cool, sweet, lemonade evening muffling his tone, making it husky, "out there are all the ups and all the downs and all the sideways that are known or ever *will* be known."

Beside him, Brown and Green and Blue and all the others stood quietly with their faces flickering like summer fireflies on a June morning with the smell of salt and baked pumpernickel in the still air.

"I could cry," said the captain.

"Yes. . . ." said White.

"Well . . ." said the captain.

"Well . . ." said Green.

The captain began to sing now, softly, a song of deep ocean space, of loneliness and all the never-hads, a song he, himself, had written on a long ago night in a long ago land.

So it's up we go and up, my lads,
To where the stardust glows —

And the crew, knowing his thoughts and his song, blended their voices with his:

From moon to moon and star to star,
The weary spaceman goes. . . .

Up they went, up, and ever up.

"When you go up," said Captain Ralph Black, "there's only one direction to go."

"Yes," breathed Blue, turning to Green with a sigh.

"UP!" chorused the crew, their cry resounding in the metal ship like the sound of exuberant pigeons free from the winter cold.

It reminded the captain of his childhood in Yucca Bluffs. He closed his eyes and his mother's cooking came back to him, even across the long years and the long miles that separated them, and his long nostrils quivered, full of the smell of cabbage and corned beef, of stale limburger and old beer cans and his brother George.

"Ah," said Captain Ralph Black, softly, hands clenched, "ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah."

Now the ship moved past the seasons, past Winter, past Summer, past Spring and past Fall. Past red leaves in October and red barns full of cow.

The captain looked at the crew and the crew looked at the captain. Each man had a job to do, but they all stood there, frozen, looking at the captain's red face.

"Well," said Blue, whitening.

Captain Ralph Black stared for

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a long moment at his old friend, the skin tight, tight across his scarred knuckles. "I'm —"

"Sorry?" asked Blue. "You needn't be, you know." He smiled, a tight white smile. "It's part of the game."

"Yes," said the captain through clenched teeth, "the game."

No one spoke for a long, long moment. All of time was in that moment, and all of the fallen Christmas snows that ever were or ever would be.

The game.

Now the ship moved up, a sea whale sperming in space, a dark night-mammoth moving through tides of stardust, lost and gone forever. The captain swore and then sighed. "Damn," he said, "I feel —"

"Good?" asked radio-repairman's mate Bob Silver, the quick one.

And Captain Ralph Black smiled.

"Lord, Lord," said Green. "I'm like a kid going home with no lunch. I feel all empty inside."

"Empty . . ." breathed the captain, slowly, lips set, savoring the word and the meaning of the word.

The crew did not move. And the ship drove for the black eternities.

Suddenly the captain swore under his breath, then over it. "Who," he wondered, "is at the controls?"

No one could answer. They stood frozen — Blue, Silver, Brown, White, Green and, of course, Black.

"I — I thought you were, Cap," Brown said at last.

They stood there for a long, long moment, looking at each other. Each man felt himself a child again, lollipop in hand, strawberry ice cream melting in mouth. Blue turned to Green and White turned to Brown and Silver turned to Black, and they looked at each other across the short, short distance as though separated by an eternity of eternities and an infinity of infinities instead of merely the short, short distance.

"This," said the captain gravely, "is not good. It is not good that no one should be at the controls, for we must go up, up, and ever up, until —"

He stopped, and the crew looked at him suddenly as though he had uttered a naughty word. The swift and devastating impact of his unfinished sentence struck them like a whip, a lash, a boat whistle shrieking across a dark riverback in the dead of night.

"Until what?" they said in unison. "Until *what*, Captain? Say it, sir, say it. Say it! We're not children you know. We're grown men, grown men. We're not children!"

But they were wrong. "We're all children in space," Captain Ralph Black said gently, wiping his nose.

The captain felt like a child again and he did not feel like a child again. He felt sick and he did not feel sick. "We've got a job to do," he said, looking at all of them, at each of them. He saw them and he did not see them.

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He was crying.

Green put his brown hand on Black's red-suited shoulder. "We're *all* that way, sir. All kids. All frosty mornings with dew on the grass."

"What do you mean?" asked the captain, eyes closed, trembling.

"I mean nothing," Green said faintly, head down, "and I mean everything." He turned away. And did not look back.

"He's gone, Captain," said Silver, showing his teeth.

There was a sudden sound like paper tearing, like a fire engine belling, and a smell like woodsmoke in October. The great ship screamed! A sudden, high-pitched, terrifying metal scream. The men stood like icicles on the deck. Frozen.

"What is it?" asked Captain Ralph Black, slowly. His face was haunted, like the face of a man who has looked into a mirror and suddenly found a man there who was not the man he thought would be there, but another man, a stranger whom he had never seen before and who made him feel a little like a small boy whistling past a silent graveyard where all the stones are white as milk under the moon.

"The engines!" the men cried. "The engines are failing!"

"Steady, men," said Captain Ralph Black, feet braced, his blood turning to raspberry sherbert.

"Steady," White said.

"Steady," echoed Blue and Brown, and Bob Silver, and all of them.

"Yes, yes, steady," said the captain. "The dials. What do the dials say?"

White leaped to the dials. He looked at them with the feverish intensity of a man who is afraid to look, for fear they might remind him of some long-ago forgotten dream, when he was all towhead and brambly sweater and scabs on the knees and the playground lights went out.

"I —" he gasped, sweat beading his face like clear crystal rain, "— can't!"

"Can't what?" prompted the captain, eyes closed again, sick again, secretly knowing.

"Can't read the dials," finished White. "I never ever really learned how."

None of them ever really had.

There is no one now, thought the captain, no one to read the dials. No one to keep the *Fare Thee Well* from going . . .

"Down," breathed Blue. "We're going down, Captain."

"Well," said Captain Ralph Black and suddenly he could think of nothing more to say. Everything had been said that *needed* to be said. There was only the ticking and the whirring and the clicking and the humming. The captain felt very old and very tired. Very old and very tired indeed.

"I'm a fool," the captain said, and began to cry again, softly, softly.

"Where to now, Captain?" the men said, looking up at him. "Where to?"

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But the answer was already in their mouths, and they were tasting each syllable, each vowel, each consonant.

Captain Ralph Black sighed. "Where else," he said slowly, without bitterness, without rancor, without sternness. "Where else but — down!"

Down, down they went, and ever down.

Down, down the *Fare Thee Well.* As it had gone up — a star, an arrow, a lance, a spear, a dart, a needle, a pencil, a fire, a flame, an entire carnival — except in the other direction.

"When you go down," said Captain Ralph Black, eyes closed, hands loose at his sides, "there is only one direction to go."

Each crew member *knew* what the captain meant. But they said nothing.

And now the great metal whale fell, screaming, screaming through vacuumed space, the triple moons of Mars whirling by, lost in tides of silverdust and longing.

And then it struck. And was silent.

The captain said nothing. Blue said nothing. Green said nothing. Silver, the quick one, said nothing. Brown said nothing. White said nothing.

They were all dead.

The band played and they were buried in the home town square under the tall vanilla face of the courthouse clock, and Granda was there, and Gramps and Uncle Thad and Tess the dog. All of them there.

And the earth was shoveled kaplaump on the wooden coffin-tops made of all the old oaks and elms and maples that ever were, that ever *would* be. And the markers were sunk, like Eskimo Pie sticks, in the soft ground, rich with October apples and the smell of hot cinnamon buns and cider.

"Well," said Gramps, wiping his cheek, "they're gone."

"Yes," said Mother. "Gone. Like we all go."

And she walked away, softly, under the murmuring trees, not looking back.

And the sun came out and the day was fine and good.

Correction and Apology

L. Sprague de Camp erred in stating (F&SF, March, p. 114) that H. Spencer Lewis' misleading article on Rosicrucianism was to be found "to this day" in the ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA. Since 1953, the BRITANNICA has carried a new and impartial treatment of the topic by Professor Charles S. Braden, Chairman of the Department of History and Literature of Religions at Northwestern University.

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All of Arthur C. Clarke's admirable non-fiction books on spaceflight — INTERPLANETARY FLIGHT (1950), THE EXPLORATION OF SPACE (1951), THE YOUNG TRAVELLER IN SPACE (1954) and THE EXPLORATION OF THE MOON (1954) — have dealt with the probable immediate future, or at most with the ultimate conquest of the Solar System. Now the former chairman of the British Interplanetary Society at last goes ultraplanetary and speculates, in his usual clear, direct and firmly grounded manner, on interstellar flight, giving us the facts and probabilities behind the casual assumptions of science fiction.

The Planets Are Not Enough

by ARTHUR C. CLARKE

THE EXPLORATION OF THE PLANETS is closer to us in time than the exploration of Africa by Stanley and Livingstone. Even before President Eisenhower told us that the United States was about to take the first steps into space no one qualified to pass judgment on the subject had any real doubts that interplanetary flight was technically feasible. The only points of debate were just when it would happen (1980 ± ten years would probably sum up informed opinion for the date of the first landing on the Moon), whether it would be done by chemical or atomic energy, and how revolutionary its consequences would be.

Apart from all the scientific reasons, which have been discussed in countless books and articles, space-travel has one justification which transcends all others. It is probably the only way in which we can hope to answer one of the supreme questions of philosophy: Is Man alone in the universe? It seems incredible that ours should be the only inhabited planet among the millions of worlds that must exist among the stars, but we cannot solve this problem by speculating about it. If it can be solved at all it will be by visiting other planets to see for ourselves.*

* *Or, as has been pointed out by many fiction-writers, including Clarke himself in* CHILDHOOD'S END *and in the very title of* EXPEDITION TO EARTH, *by our being visited.*

— A. B.

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The Solar System, comprising the nine known worlds of our sun and their numerous satellites, is a relatively compact structure, a snug little celestial oasis in an endless desert. It is true that millions of miles separate Earth from its neighbors, but such distances are cosmically trivial. They will even be trivial in terms of human engineering before another 100 years — a mere second in historical time — has elapsed. However, the distances which sunder us from the possible worlds of other stars are of a totally different order of magnitude, and there are fundamental reasons for thinking that nothing — no scientific discovery or technical achievement — will ever make *them* trivial.

The rocket engineers of today think in speeds of miles a second; though the present record is only about 1.5 mps, the artificial satellites now being planned will attain velocities of 5 mps. When today's chemical fuels have been developed to the ultimate, and such tricks as refueling in space have been fully exploited, we will have spaceships which can attain speeds of about 10 mps. That means that the Moon will be reached in less than five days, and the nearer planets in about half a year. (I am deliberately rounding these numbers off, and anyone who tries to check my arithmetic had better remember that spaceships will never travel in straight lines or at uniform speeds.) The remoter planets, such as Jupiter and Saturn, could be reached only after many years of travel, and so the trio Moon-Mars-Venus marks the practical limit of exploration for chemically propelled spaceships. Even for these cases it is easy to demonstrate that hundreds of tons of fuel would be needed for each ton of payload that would make the round trip.

This situation, which used to depress the pre-atomic-energy astronauts, will not last for long. Since we are not concerned here with engineering details we can take it for granted that eventually nuclear power in some form or other will be harnessed for the purposes of spaceflight. The short-lived Uranium Age will see the dawn of spaceflight; the succeeding era of fission power will witness its fulfilment.

But even when we can travel among the planets as freely as we now travel over this earth we will be no nearer to solving the problem of Man's comrades in the universe. That is a secret that will still lie hidden in the stars. For all the evidence indicates that we are the only thinking inhabitants of the Solar System. We are the only conscious castaways upon the tiny raft of the Solar System, as it drifts forever along the Gulf Streams of the Galaxy.

How to pass beyond the Solar System? The nearest of the stars is a million times further away than the closest of the planets. The spaceships we may expect to see a generation

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from now would take about 100,000 years to reach Proxima Centauri, our nearest stellar neighbor. Even the hypothetical nuclear-powered space-ships which a full century of atomic engineering may produce could hardly make the journey in less than 1,000 years.

In one of his novels C. S. Lewis referred to "God's quarantine regulations." There may be millions of inhabited worlds circling other suns, harboring beings who to us would seem godlike, with civilizations and cultures beyond our wildest dreams. But we shall never meet them, and they for their part will never know of our existence. So run the conclusions of most astronomers, even those who are sure that "mere" interplanetary flight is just around the corner. But it is always dangerous to make negative predictions. Though the difficulties of *interstellar* travel are stupendous they are not insuperable. It is by no means certain that Man must remain trapped in the Solar System for eternity, never to know if he is a lonely freak without brothers and/or competitors.

There are two ways in which we might gain direct knowledge of other stellar systems without ever leaving our own. It can be shown that radio communication would be perfectly feasible across interstellar space if very slow-speed telegraphy were employed. However, we can hardly assume that anyone would be listening in at the precise frequency with a receiver tuned to the extremely narrow band (a few cycles per second wide!) which would have to be employed.

A more practical, though at first sight more startling, solution would be to send a survey ship — unmanned. This would be a gigantic extrapolation of existing techniques, but it would not involve anything fundamentally new. Imagine an automatic vessel, crammed with every type of recording instrument and controlled by an electronic brain with preset instructions. It would be launched out across space aimed at a target it might not reach for 1,000 years. But at last one of the stars ahead would begin to dominate the sky, and a century or so later this would have grown into a sun, perhaps with planets circling round it. Sleeping instruments would wake to life, the tiny ship would check its speed, its sense organs would start to record their impressions. It would circle world after world, following a program set up to cover all possible contingencies by men who had died 1,000 years before at home. Then, with the priceless knowledge it had gained, it would begin the long voyage home.

This type of proxy exploration of the universe would be slow and uncertain and would demand long-range planning beyond the capacity of our present age. Yet, if there is no other way of contacting the stars, this is how it might be done. One millennium would make an invest-

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ment in technical skill, the next millennium would reap the benefit. It would be as if Archimedes were to start a research project which could produce no results before the time of Einstein — which, if you consider "science" as a whole the research project, is just the way it was done.

If men, and not merely their machines, are ever to reach the planets of other suns, problems of much greater difficulty will have to be solved. Stated in its simplest form, the question is this: How can men survive a journey which may last for several thousand years? There are at least five different answers which must be regarded as theoretical possibilities.

Medicine may provide two rather obvious solutions. There appears to be no fundamental reason why men should die when they do. It is certainly not a matter of the body "wearing out" in the sense that a piece of machinery does, for in the course of a single year almost the entire fabric of our bodies is replaced by new material. When we have discovered the details of this physiological process it may be possible to extend the life-span indefinitely. Whether a crew of immortals, however psychologically adjusted, could tolerate one another for several centuries in rather cramped quarters is another question.

Perhaps a better answer is that suggested by the story of Rip Van Winkle. Suspended animation (or, more accurately, a drastic slowing down of the body's metabolism) for periods of a few hours is now, of course, a medical commonplace. It requires no great stretch of the imagination to suppose that, with the aid of low temperatures and drugs, men may be able to hibernate for virtually unlimited periods. We can picture an automatic ship with its oblivious crew making the long journey across the interstellar night until, when a new sun was looming up, the signal was sent out to trigger the mechanisms which would revive the sleepers. When their survey was completed they would head back to Earth and slumber again until the time came to awake once more, and to greet a world which would regard them as survivors from the distant past.

The third solution was, to the best of my knowledge, suggested for the first time some thirty years ago by Professor J. D. Bernal in a long out-of-print essay, "The World, the Flesh and the Devil," which must rank as one of the outstanding feats of scientific imagination in literature. Bernal imagined entire societies launched across space in gigantic arks which would be closed, ecologically balanced systems. They would, in fact, be miniature planets, upon which generations of men would live and die so that one day their remote descendants would return to Earth with the record of their celestial Odyssey. The engineering, biological, and sociological

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problems involved in such an enterprise would be of fascinating complexity. The artificial planets (at least several miles in diameter) would have to be completely self-contained and self-supporting, and no material of any kind could be wasted. Commenting on the implications of such closed systems *Time* magazine's science-editor Jonathan Leonard once hinted that cannibalism would be compulsory among interstellar travelers. This would be a matter of definition; we crew members of the 2,000,000,000 man spaceship Earth do not consider ourselves cannibals, despite the fact that every one of us must have absorbed atoms which once formed part of Caesar and Socrates, Shakespeare and Solomon.

One cannot help feeling that the interstellar ark on its 1,000-year voyage would be a cumbersome way of solving the problem, even if all the social and psychological difficulties could be overcome. (Would the fiftieth generation still share the aspirations of their Pilgrim Fathers who set out from Earth so long ago?) There are, however, more sophisticated ways of getting men to the stars than the crude, brute-force methods outlined above. After the hard-headed engineering of the last few paragraphs what follows may appear to verge upon fantasy. It involves, in the most fundamental sense of the word, the storage of human beings. A few months ago, in an Australian laboratory, I was watching what appeared to be perfectly normal spermatozoa wriggling across a microscopic field. They *were* perfectly normal, but their *history* was not. For three years they had been immobile in a deep freeze, and there seemed little doubt that they could be kept fertile for centuries by the same technique. What was still more surprising: there had been enough successes with the far larger and more delicate ova to indicate that they too might survive the same treatment. If this proves to be the case reproduction will eventually become independent of time.

The social implications of this make anything in *Brave New World* seem like child's play, but I am not concerned here with the interesting results which might have been obtained by, for example, uniting the genes of Cleopatra and Newton. The cumbersome interstellar ark, with its generations of travelers doomed to spend their entire lives in empty space, was merely a device to carry germ cells, knowledge, and culture from one sun to another. How much more efficient to send only the cells, to fertilize them automatically some twenty years before the voyage was due to end, to carry the embryos through to birth by techniques already foreshadowed in today's biology labs, and to bring up the babies under the tutelage of cybernetic nurses who would teach them their inheritance and their destiny when they were capable of understanding it.

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These children, knowing no parents, or indeed anyone of a different age from themselves, would grow up in the strange artificial world of their speeding ship, reaching maturity in time to explore the planets ahead of them — perhaps to be the ambassadors of humanity among alien races, or perhaps to find, too late, that there was no home for them here. If their mission succeeded it would be their duty (or that of their descendants if the first generation could not complete the task) to see that the knowledge they had gained was some day carried back to Earth.

Would any society be morally justified in planning so onerous and uncertain a future for its unborn — indeed unconceived — children? That is a question to which different ages may reply in different ways. What to one era seems a cold-blooded sacrifice might to another appear a great and glorious adventure.

So far we have assumed that all interstellar voyages must of necessity last for many hundreds or even thousands of years. The nearest star is more than four light-years away; the Galaxy itself — the island universe of which our sun is one insignificant member — is hundreds of thousands of light-years across; and the distances *between* the Galaxies are of the order of 1,000,000 light-years. The speed of light appears to be a fundamental limit to velocity; in this sense it is quite different from the now outmoded "sound barrier," which is merely an attribute of the particular gases which happen to constitute our atmosphere. Even if we could reach the speed of light, therefore, interstellar journeys would still require many years of travel, and only in the case of the very nearest stars would it appear possible for a voyager to make the round trip in a single lifetime, without resort to such techniques as suspended animation. However, as we shall see, the actual situation is a good deal more complex than this.

First of all, is it even theoretically possible to build spaceships capable of approaching the speed of light? (That is, 186,000 miles a second or 670,000,000 mph.) The problem is that of finding a sufficient source of energy and applying it. Einstein's famous equation $E = mc^2$ gives an answer — on paper — which a few centuries of technology may be able to realize in terms of engineering. If we can achieve the *total* annihilation of matter — not the conversion of a mere fraction of a per cent of it into energy — we can approach as nearly to the speed of light as we please. We can never reach it, but a journey at 99.9 per cent the speed of light would, after all, take very little longer than one at exactly the speed of light, so the difference would hardly seem of practical importance.

Complete annihilation of matter is still as much a dream as atomic en-

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ergy itself was twenty years ago. However, the recent discovery of the anti-proton may be the first step on the road to its realization. Traveling at speeds approaching that of light, however, involves us at once in one of the most baffling paradoxes which spring from the Theory of Relativity — the so-called. "Time Dilation Effect." Time itself is a variable quantity; the rate at which it flows depends upon the speed of the observer. The difference is infinitesimal at the velocities of everyday life, and even at the velocities of normal astronomical bodies. It is all-important as we approach to within a few per cent of the speed of light. To put it crudely, the faster one travels the more slowly time will pass. At the speed of light time ceases to exist; the moment "Now" lasts forever.

Let us take an extreme example to show what this implies. If a spaceship left Earth for Proxima Centauri at the speed of light and came back at once at the same velocity it would have been gone for some eight and one-half years according to all the clocks and calendars of Earth. *But the people in the ship, and all their clocks, would have recorded no elapsed time.* At a physically attainable speed, say 95 per cent of the velocity of light, the inhabitants of the ship would think that the round trip had lasted about three years. At 99 per cent it would have seemed little more than a year to them. In each case, however, they would return more than eight years — Earth time — after they had departed.

It should be emphasized that this effect, incredible though it appears to be, is one of the natural consequences of Einstein's theory. The equation connecting mass and energy once appeared to be equally fantastic and remote from any practical application. But anything which does not violate natural laws must be considered a possibility — and the events of the last few decades have shown clearly enough that things which are possible will always be achieved if the incentive is sufficiently great.

Whether the incentive will be sufficient here is a question which only the future can answer. The men of 500 or 1,000 years from now will have motivations very different from ours, but if they are men at all they will still burn with that restless curiosity which has driven us over this world and which is about to take us into space. Sooner or later we will come to the edge of the Solar System and will be looking out across the ultimate abyss. We may pause there for centuries, gathering our strength. Then we will reach out for the stars.

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It's been far too long — almost three years — since F&SF has printed a story by R. Bretnor. (Or, to be precise, a story with the Bretnor by-line; I wonder how well the pseudonym-detectives among you have been doing. . . .) I'm hoping for some new Bretnor soon; and meanwhile here is the first magazine appearance of one of his most attractive and characteristic stories: charming, funny, pointed, imaginative, and about cats — in a word, Bretnoric.

Genius of the Species

by R. BRETNOR

CHILDREN, AREN'T WE PROUD OF dear little Emily for being so smart and asking such a clever question? Of course we are! It shows that she's thinking for herself, and I'm going to do my very best to answer it. Let's all go outside first, though, and curl up in the sun. One can't help feeling sorry for these poor creatures in their cages, but the noise they make *is* simply deafening. You can't seem to train them, no matter how you try.

There, isn't that better? Now we can hear ourselves think, and I can tell you how it happened. It all began before you were born, in a big, cold city where there was a man who told everyone else what to do . . .

Yes, Gilbert dear, they let him get away with it. Why did they? Goodness, *I* don't know. It's just one of the mysteries of nature, I suppose.

Anyhow, one day this man called a meeting of his chief assistants, all of whom showed up wearing gold braid and medals and very anxious expressions because he looked so angry. He waited until they were seated around his long table. Then, in a ferocious voice, he said, "I suppose, Comrades, that you know maybe a little about Marxist history? I suppose you know how in 1962 the famous Malenkov Curtain replaced our old Iron one? Maybe some of you even are knowing what the Malenkov Curtain is for?"

They all nodded hastily. "Yes, yes. Yes, indeed, Comrade Little Red Father," they chorused.

He ignored them. "*I* will tell

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you!" he shouted. "It extends from the North Pole to Tibet, from Shanghai to Romania. It kills everything right away — nothing that lives can get through it, not even a microbe. It burns up any metal that tries to go through, also anything radioactive like bombs. It allows sunlight in, but it stops all the waves of the radio. Inside it we are safe from the Fascist aggressors, from their atom-bomb bases up on the moon, from their *Wall Street Journal!*"

He paused. Immediately they all started cheering, "Long live our great Generalissimo! Long live the Malenkov Curtain! Down with the moon!"

He waited until they had finished. "So maybe you think this Malenkov Curtain is such a fine thing?" he said with a sneer. "Maybe you think it is good that everyone knows we are safe from attack? You are wrong! Because of this Malenkov Curtain — and something that happened this morning — we are now in great peril!"

The other men at the table exchanged startled glances. One or two of them cried, "Down with the Malenkov Curtain!" rather weakly.

"Malenkov was a genius like me," continued the man who told everyone else what to do. "He invented the Curtain to protect *us* from the capitalists until we were set to attack them. He certainly never intended that it should protect *them* from *us*. But he allowed two Austrian scientists whom he caught in the war to do part of the work. They were saboteurs! They claimed that *they* had invented it. And they installed the machines under the Curtain itself, making them work from the gravity of the earth so that they would never run down. Then they betrayed Malenkov into having them purged before they could tell anyone else how it worked. Comrades, we were sealed in!"

He hammered his fist on the table. "And now I shall tell you what happened this morning!" he roared. "This morning, in the Siberian village of Yutsk, a person named Elmer Pumpett was liquidated. He was an American, captured alive in Korea a long time ago. He was seventy-three years of age, and was posing as an innocent slave laborer in a leg-iron foundry. Under questioning, he admitted that he had once earned two so-called *merit badges* for his work in a gang of counter-revolutionary wreckers. Comrades, the liquidation of Elmer Pumpett was a crisis in the history of the glorious Revolution!"

He snarled at them very unpleasantly. "You are dismayed? You think that Elmer Pumpett was of no importance? You think that we are liquidating thousands like him every day? Well, you are fools! The Malenkov Curtain isolates us from the West. It is impenetrable. We cannot turn it off. Therefore, Elmer Pumpett was the *last* Fascistic-capitalistic-imperialistic saboteur.

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He was the last corrupt lackey of the plutocratic Wall Street bosses. He was the last Hitlerite-Trotskyite-Titoite spy. *He was the very last decadent, warmongering bourgeois exploiter of the toiling masses in our entire world!* Comrades, do you know what that means?"

None of them said anything.

"It means that we no longer can pretend that there is any danger to the State. Therefore there is no need for concentration camps, for liquidations, for our huge army, for the Special Secret Police, or even" — he glared at a sharp-nosed little man at the far end of the table — "for the Ordinary Secret Police. In short, there is no longer any need for *us*. What do you think of *that?*"

His listeners were appalled. They turned pale and started squirming in their chairs and ran their fingers around inside the collars of their uniforms.

An ugly, fat fellow jumped up. "Deviationist!" he screamed at the sharp-nosed little man. "This is the fault of your Ordinary Secret Police — liquidating valuable enemies! — wasting our national resources!"

Another of the comrades waved a fistful of papers. "I have here," he shouted, "a report on those who keep books overdue from the libraries. Traitors! Enemies of the people! We can liquidate *them*."

The man who told everyone else what to do shook his head. "We could have maybe a purge," he declared. "For example, we could liquidate people who snore and disturb other families who live in the room. But such measures would not be effective. I saw that at once. I said to myself, 'We must have a really fine danger like the Malikite plotters in the late nineteen-fifties.' And naturally, Comrades, I found one right under your noses."

He preened himself. "Oh, it's an excellent danger; it couldn't be better. Imagine — reactionaries, saboteurs, greedy individualists! Millions of them in all of our countries, even in Russia, even right here in the Kremlin!"

The other men looked around apprehensively. "Wh-who are they? D-do we know them?"

"*Ha!* I shall tell you. They are everywhere — in factories, collective farms, prisons. They are in the camps of our mighty Red Army, in our government bureaus! They carry no passports. They do as they please. No one suspects them! *Who* are they?"

He shook his clenched fist in a fury.

"They are . . . *cats!*"

Then, after a moment, he added, "Kittens, too."

Yes, Gilbert dear, I know that it's hard to believe. But he was as serious as I am.

"Comrades," he cried out, "are cats organized, disciplined? Do they work fourteen hours a day? Do they ever report their parents and friends to the police? Do they turn in most of their prey to improve the diet

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of our workers and peasants? The answer is definitely *no*. Many are pampered and petted, and do nothing at all. The rest work when they want to, for themselves. They are parasites. They wash themselves all the time like rich bourgeois. What more do we need? DOWN WITH CATS!"

"*Liquidate them!*" screeched the Minister of Revolutionary Security. "We must have cat pogroms — cat concentration camps — mass trials of cat culprits!"

"*Liquidate them!*" bellowed the Red Army Minister, clanking his medals. "We will start an Order of Anti-cat Heroes of the Soviet Fatherland, First, Second, and Third Class!"

"We must be pro-mouse, pro-bird!" they all yelled. "Catnip is the opiate of the people! *Liquidate all the cats! Liquidate them!*"

They were having a wonderful time, stamping and brandishing their brief cases in the most blood-curdling manner, when all of a sudden . . .

"SILENCE!" roared the man who told everyone else what to do. "Nincompoops! What will happen if we liquidate all the cats right away?"

They gaped at him.

"I shall tell you. Soon there will be a cat Elmer Pumpett. Then where will we find such another excellent danger? Where will we find our fine sables to wear? Who will catch the small rodents that eat up our crops? Ah, comrades . . ."

He smiled.

". . . how fortunate it is that I am a genius! Cat is an economic animal; maybe Marx himself said so. Therefore at first we shall liquidate only *some* of the cats. The rest will work at efficient forced labor until we can train peasants to replace them. I shall announce our triumphant Anti-cat Five-year Plan in person tomorrow, in Red Square."

Why, *Emily*, what makes you think I'm not answering your question? I certainly *am;* I'm leading right up to it. Now, where was I? Oh, yes . . .

The very next day a capacity crowd of three million was herded into the square. All over the place huge pictures showed the man who told everyone else what to do feeding a mouse to a very thin baby with one hand and holding off hordes of saber-toothed cats with the other. The captions said, DOWN WITH CATS! PROTEIN FOR THE PEOPLE! And the cats had dollar signs printed on them.

The man climbed up to the top of a big pyramid thing they called Stalin's Tomb, and spoke to the people, awakening them to the danger and explaining how he was going to save them. His oration was punctuated by vast cheers, timed to the second by the police.

After he had finished, some forty divisions of the Red Army paraded, equipped with huge, slavering dogs

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previously used against political prisoners; and several more divisions of dogs dropped from the sky in a spectacular mass parachute jump. Three cats — a gray, a black, and a tortoise shell — who had come out of their houses to see what the fuss was about, were fearlessly torn to pieces by the crowd. Finally, the entire population of Moscow sang "Long Live Our Little Red Father" to the tune of "Mother Machree" (written originally by an industrial worker in Pskov, and stolen by British imperialists because of its obvious value as anti-Irish propaganda).

The successful first phase of the Anti-cat Five-year Plan involved the swift liquidation of Persian cats, Siamese cats, fat ordinary cats, and their owners. The Secret Police, aided by the intellectual World Activist Council of Ailurophobes and by the eager young buds of the League of Militant Catless Youth, speedily rooted out the last cat collaborators, cat sympathizers, cat kulaks. In no time at all, the feline population within the Malenkov Curtain had been reduced by thirty-three per cent, and the number of elderly ladies and other cat deviationists had been cut down even more drastically.

All cats were now the property of the State. They were assembled in Cat Collectives, each assigned to a farm, a factory, a tenement district. In every Collective, disciplinary functions were delegated to a Dog Battalion of the Red Army, supervised by a company of the Ordinary Secret Police, supervised in turn by a platoon of Special Secret Police. Each cat was issued a ration card, entitling it to eat one small mouse every day — and anything more was instantly seized by the Police. The papers boasted that this would increase the average worker's meat ration to ten per cent of what it had been in the reign of Nicholas II, and promised that things would be even better when inefficient cats could be replaced by millions of peasant volunteers trained for the purpose.

Can you imagine it, children? At four every morning men with whips and great, snarling dogs drove the poor cats from their cages and herded them off through the snow to the fields, cellars, and warehouses where they worked. A sharp watch was kept for any who dared to wash, climb trees, or take even the littlest nap, and those who were caught were mercilessly punished on the spot. Then, long after nightfall, the weary columns limped back, bedraggled and wretched, with scarcely the strength left to mew.

As the weeks passed, the official accounts of the success of the Plan became louder and longer. Then, abruptly, the papers announced that the Minister of Collectivized Agriculture had been sabotaging it all along. At the largest mass trial in history, it was proved that he had conspired with several hundred

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aides, friends, and relations, all of whom were convicted and liquidated. On the stand he confessed to a treasonable fondness for an aunt who had once kept three kittens as pets.

Six weeks later the Red Army Minister, five marshals, and eighty-one generals suffered an almost identical fate. In an additional month — after seven more ministers had been purged, together with most of the Politburo and some tens of thousands of minor officials — even the people began to suspect that something was wrong.

It was at this juncture that the man who told everyone else what to do summoned the Minister of Revolutionary Security for a conference.

My dears, he was perfectly *furious*. He was kicking and screaming and tearing his hair, and smashing chairs right and left.

"Read these reports! *Read them!*" he bawled, as the minister entered the room. "Why are we catching eight hundred per cent fewer mice in one month? What good are your fat Secret Police? Bah!" *Crash* went a chair. "Forty-three unplanned famines already! In my bedroom, right here in the Kremlin, rats are eating up my best boots! And you — you liquidate a few people . . ."

He broke off. He stared at the minister. "*Why are you smiling?*" he asked dangerously.

"Ah, Comrade Excellency, it is because I have wonderful news! The criminals we are liquidating deliberately twisted your meaning when you were solving our problem. '*Cat is an economic animal,*' you declared. Those were exactly your words. Lenin himself couldn't have put it more neatly."

"That's true enough," growled the man. "Hmm — continue."

"I was thinking about it for weeks. I would say to myself, 'Comrade Little Red Father is too busy saving peace and democracy to explain to people like me. *Cat is an economic animal. Man is also an economic animal.* But Man did not know it until we came along and explained Marx to him. Therefore how can Cat know it? Perhaps that is why, instead of obeying and working hard catching mice, cats lie down and die? Perhaps we must make every cat understand Marx? Maybe this is Comrade Little Red Father's real meaning?' "

He explained that at first he'd kept silent because he was hoping that the mass training program at the Happy-Birthday-Comrade-Molotov Turnip Collective would soon provide peasants to replace all the cats . . .

"I failed," he cried, "to foresee that our peasants could never learn to catch clever creatures like mice. But when I heard the report, I realized you had planned the whole thing simply to prove that they couldn't! I at once summoned Scientist Gugov, who is famous as an expert on cats, and I said, 'Com-

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rade, would it be possible to raise the intelligence of a cat so he is as smart as a peasant and can understand Marx?' He replied, 'The intellect of the cat would only have to be raised a few points, to an average of twenty point two. Already I have made preliminary experiments which show that it would not be too hard.' So I put him to work, first taking his wife and three children away to provide an incentive. And, Comrade Excellency, what do you think?" He clapped his hands happily. "We have been completely successful! At this very moment Scientist Gugov is waiting outside with the cat."

Though he had never heard of Gugov before, the man who told everyone else what to do betrayed no surprise. "Comrade Scientist Gugov," he stated, "undertook this research at my personal suggestion some months ago. However, I am pleased to hear that we have succeeded. Bring him in."

The minister opened the door, and two members of the Special Secret Police pushed the scientist into the room.

He was a small, scrawny man with straw-colored hair and a set of steel teeth. He was afraid of the minister, whom he had first met early that morning, when he was dragged out of prison. And he was much more afraid of the man who told everyone else what to do. He just stood there and trembled, hoping he wouldn't offend them.

But he really needn't have worried, because their entire attention was focused on his companion.

And no wonder! He cut a much finer figure. He was sleek and black, with four white feet, and white whiskers, and a white tip to his magnificent tail. He weighed at least half a pood, all of it muscle. His name was Ivan Grozni, which means Ivan the Terrible.

Ivan sat down, as composed as you please. In perfect Russian, with a trace of a Mandarin accent, he said, "Good afternoon, Comrade Excellency."

This seemed to disturb the man who told everyone else what to do. He looked at Ivan's enormous green eyes. He looked away, clearing his throat. "Are you sure," he demanded, "that this cat is politically reliable? We cannot have cats speaking Russian like peasants if they say the wrong things. I must test him." He peered at Ivan again. "Cat, do you know who I am?"

"You are our Little Red Father," replied Ivan, "our beloved Generalissimo, Workerissimo, Peasantissimo, and benevolent Secret Policimo. If it were not for you, cruel Wall Street bankers would be eating our kittens every evening for supper. The thought of you, when I liquidate a big rat, inspires me to redouble my efforts."

The man nodded. "Tell me, Cat . . ." His voice was not quite so severe. ". . . are your efforts producing results?"

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"Last week," Ivan said, "by putting in overtime as a Stakhanovite cat, I exceeded my mouse and rat quotas by thirty-one and six-tenths per cent."

There were many more questions. Did Ivan ever stop hunting to wash, sleep, or flirt with cats of the opposite sex? Did he hiss at the dogs who drove him to work, or try to keep more than his ration of mice? Did he attend Party schools? Did he read *Pravda* all through every day?

Ivan gave just the right answers; and the man's voice became more and more friendly. Finally, "Cat," he asked, "can you explain dialectical materialism to me?"

"Comrade Excellency," Ivan answered, "my intelligence has only been raised up to twenty points, that of a peasant. Everyone knows that only you can properly interpret such a deep subject, and that you have stated it all in one phrase: *Cat is an economic animal.* It is beautiful. It makes me purr to think of it."

And immediately the rumble of Ivan's deep purr filled the room.

The man who told everyone else what to do sprang up with a shout. "A triumph of Soviet science! This cat is a true proletarian! Comrade Gugov, how did we do it? You must tell me our method at once."

"C-Comrade Excellency, we f-f-fed him with b-black caviar," stammered the scientist, still badly frightened. "W-we put phosphorus in it, for the b-b-brain, and treated it in the b-big atomic reactor."

"Wonderful! Right away, Comrade Gugov, we must process all cats! Under me, you will be in full charge — I am making you Minister of Class-conscious Cats, Atomic Reactors, and Black Caviar. I am giving you Special Secret Police to protect you day and night. I am even returning your wife and your children — I hope without too much damage."

He turned to the Minister of Revolutionary Security. "Comrade, you, too, shall be richly rewarded. I am sending you a lovely, life-sized portrait of me to hang on the wall."

Then he pointed at Ivan with pride. "As for you, Comrade Cat, you may eat one extra mouse every week. I am signing the orders at once. Tomorrow in Red Square we shall have a great mass meeting for telling the people. DOWN WITH MICE!"

"DOWN WITH THEM!" shouted Ivan, and the scientist, and the Minister of Revolutionary Security all together.

Hush, Gilbert. Hush, Annabelle dear. I know *just* what you're going to say — that no one ever heard of a cat as obedient as that. Uh-huh. Well, this Ivan the Terrible was a very remarkable cat, and it's a good thing he was, I can tell you.

All that night, thousands of men were kept busy as bees, changing posters all over the place. The new ones had the man who told everyone else what to do standing by a moun-

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tain of mice. He was flanked by two cats bearing banners with hammers and sickles. MEAT FOR THE MASSES! the captions proclaimed. SUPPORT OUR HEROIC CAT COMRADES!

The next afternoon, when the Square had filled up with people, the man made another long speech, and Ivan made an exceedingly short one. The ovation, of course, was just as long as before.

From the start the Feline Frontline Fighters Five-year Plan was a tremendous success. A wonderful slaughter of sturgeon provided thousands of tons of black caviar, and the inmates of each Cat Collective were speedily processed. They were taught to speak and read Russian, indoctrinated politically and ideologically, and sent back to their duties.

In less than six months a jubilant press was able to announce that more than half the State's cats had been proletarianized — and that the average daily catch of edible rodents had been raised by eight thousand per cent. Learned papers began to appear, advocating the unionization of cats and their admission to the Communist Party.

Each morning at four the cats marched off bravely to work, singing "Long Live Our Little Red Father" at the tops of their voices. Each evening at eight they marched back to bone up on *Das Kapital.* There was no pausing to wash, no malingering. Every cat put in oodles of overtime, even refusing to take off fifteen minutes for lunch. Gradually the dogs were withdrawn and the soldiers. Before ten months had passed, there was only one Secret Police corporal with a whip at the head of each battalion of cats.

The man who told everyone else what to do was tremendously pleased. "Soon every cat will be smart like a peasant," he frequently said to the Minister of Revolutionary Security of an evening. "They will catch more and more rats and mice. After a while, there will be hardly any rodents at all. Then we will have another Anti-cat Five-year Plan. We will prove that they plotted to exterminate all these creatures in order to loaf and eat caviar every day. Is it not fortunate, Comrade, that I am a genius?"

Sure enough, children, the day came around when the very last cat had been processed. It was during the harvest, but everyone was given a day off to attend festive mass meetings.

Right after breakfast Ivan the Terrible entered Gugov's laboratory. The scientist's uniform was all brushed and shined, but he looked awfully unhappy and worried. "Why are you here, Comrade Cat Ivan?" he groaned. "Our Five-year Plan has been triumphantly finished in less than twelve months. Tomorrow there will be no further need for a Minister of Class-conscious Cats, Atomic Reactors, and Black Caviar. The Special Secret

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Police will arrive. *Poof!* — no more Gugov. Oh, I haven't enough troubles already; I should be bothered by cats!"

Ivan sat down on the desk, curling his tail around him. "I am here," he said, "for one reason — I like you."

"*Shh! Shh!*" Poor Gugov almost jumped out of his skin. "Don't *say* such a thing. Individual affection is treason!"

"We cats *all* like you," Ivan amended. "That is collective affection and perfectly legal. And because we do like you, I am going to do you a favor. Did you keep your original computations on improving the feline mind? Are they handy?"

"Of course — but why, Comrade Cat? They are full of mathematical formulas you can't understand. Besides, the parade will begin at . . ."

Ivan cut him off short. "Don't worry about the parade. It's much more important that we go over your papers together. *Please*, as a favor to me."

The scientist shrugged. Grumbling, he opened his desk and drew out a bundle of notes, full of abstruse equations like this:

$$E = \frac{\text{Cat}}{\text{oo}\ \ (\sqrt{-1})} = mc^2$$

Ivan examined them quickly, turning them over with his paw until he came to page seventeen. Then, "Ah-ha!" he exclaimed. "I *thought* so." And he pointed at a little black dot.

"We call that a decimal point," said the scientist.

"I know," replied Ivan. "But shouldn't it be *here*, not *there?*"

There was the funniest silence. Comrade Gugov began to perspire. He started to shiver and shake.

"So you see," Ivan murmured, "it should come out as two hundred two points, and not twenty point two."

"B-b-but that is *impossible*. It would mean that you are a cat intellectual, a — a cat genius! And you musn't be — *really*. In our State, there is only *one* genius." He clapped a hand to his forehead. "I must report you to our Little Red Father. That is clearly my duty."

"But it's not only *me*," Ivan pointed out gently. "Thanks to you, we are all intellectuals. Every cat in our world is a genius. I think he'll be very displeased when you tell him about it."

Gugov gave vent to a most dismal moan. "But how could I know? You have all been behaving like peasants — not washing, doing what you were told, singing working-class songs. It's unfair, that's what it is!"

"But exceedingly sensible," put in Ivan. "Several years ago, dear Gugov, you published a book called *Cat and the Classless Society: Can Felis Domesticus Help Us Build Socialism?* You said that we were

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inflexibly individualistic and disobedient by nature, fond of luxury — but useful in spite of it all. Well, you were right. And now we are going to prove it. In just a few minutes we're starting *our* Five-year Plan."

Gugov was terribly upset, and Ivan had to give him a quick scratch on the hand when he attempted to pick up the phone.

"Now there's no sense in getting all fussed," Ivan said. "The guards are out of the way, and there isn't a thing you can do. Anyhow, we aren't going to attack any men. It isn't our nature. We're simply having a Cat General Strike. We're going to hide in the forests and refuse to catch mice and rats, field mice, dormice, sparrows, and so on. Instead, we'll devote our attention to young owls and hawks, serpents, weasels, and stoats. Of course, you'll come with us, with your wife and your children, because, as I said, we do like you. And we won't come out till the world's fit to live in again."

Gugov gazed sadly at Ivan's intelligent face. He looked sadly up at the wall, which was papered with pictures of the man who told everyone else what to do.

"Very well, I shall come," he agreed, picking up his portfolio. "Perhaps it is all for the best."

And it was, naturally. There was a terrific to-do when the cats disappeared. The Red Army and Navy went after them, and the Ordinary Secret Police and the Special Secret Police. Even the *Very* Special Secret Police came out of the Kremlin to join the pursuit.

It didn't do them much good. They killed a great many rabbits and lots of small dogs — but they didn't average more than three or four cats a week, in spite of their victory parades. However, they weren't worried at first, because the cats had worked hard, and the peasants had such a good harvest.

It wasn't until the next year, when the second harvest came in, that they noticed the difference. My, but the rats and the mice and their friends were having a wonderful time! There was practically no one to catch them. They ate and got bigger and bolder. They ate — and, oh, how they multiplied!

The soldiers and sailors and police had to forget all about hunting cats. They were much too busy trying to break up huge rat demonstrations and enormous mass meetings of mice. The year after that, things were very much worse. Pedestrians weren't safe in the streets in broad daylight, and fleas were jumping from the rats to the people and making them sick, and the shooting had started.

The shooting went on quite a while, but even it had to stop in the third year — because by that time everything inside the Malenkov Curtain was one big, unplanned famine, and few people were left.

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Well, children, one day Ivan and a few of his friends were taking a walk in the woods when suddenly they came on a clearing, and there — What *do* you suppose? There was the man who told everyone else what to do, and the Minister of Revolutionary Security, and six or eight others, men and women, all bundled together and tied up with ropes! And weren't they annoyed!

Ivan regarded them quietly, paying no attention to the horrid things they were saying. Then he looked at the forest and wrinkled his sensitive nose.

"You can come out," he announced. "It's perfectly safe. We won't eat you!"

He had to repeat it two or three times, but finally a great burly peasant appeared, sniveling and cringing. He was presently followed by about fifty others, who crept up, bowing to Ivan and touching their forelocks and staring at him in awe.

"Good morning," said Ivan.

"Good day to you, Little Cat Father," the first peasant whined. "Just see what we've brought you, all tied up so nicely. We've carried them ever so far. And, *Bozhe moi!*, we would've come sooner, but it's been so hard finding you. You'd never believe it. We asked everyone, 'Please, where can we find the handsome, brave cat who tells all the other cats what to do?' And nobody knew."

Ivan lashed the tip of his tail. "Of course not. No cat *ever* tells another cat what to do. We value our freedom too much."

"Please do not be angry, Your excellency. Please do not speak in such difficult riddles. We are just simple peasants who have come to beg your forgiveness and to tell you how much we've missed you."

"I gather," said Ivan, "that you want us to come back and catch mice?"

The man got down on his knees. "Oh, *would* you? If you'll *please* come back, you can live in the Kremlin itself. We'll be good as gold. We'll do whatever you say!" And two tears ran down his nose into his big, smelly beard.

Ivan sighed. "Listen carefully, Friend Peasant. No cat tells another cat what to do. No cat ever lets *anyone* else tell him what to do. Can you understand that?"

"I — I can *try*."

"Very well. If we agree to come back, it must be under different conditions. There are certain small matters like houses to live in, and books, and veal cutlets and chicken and fresh caviar — but these can come later. First, you must make me one promise: *That you never again will let anyone else, man or cat, dictate what you should do.*"

"But that means that we must think for ourselves! We could never do *that!*"

"It'll seem hard at first," Ivan told him, "but you'll catch on with practice."

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The peasant shook with emotion. "I — I promise — Little Cat Father."

And, one by one, his companions echoed him quaveringly.

"All right, then," Ivan said. "I shall come back and catch mice . . ."

The peasants shouted with joy. They leaped and they danced and they kissed one another.

". . . but you'll have to make separate arrangements with each of the rest of us. I've a feeling that we'll all agree to come back on pretty much the same terms, but I can only speak for myself."

The peasants bowed themselves happily out to spread the good news; and Ivan was left with his friends and the still-spluttering prisoners.

"Oh dear, what will we do with them?" asked Ninon, a petite silver tabby of whom Ivan was exceedingly fond.

"Might as well put them out of their misery," said somebody else.

Ivan pondered a while. Then, "Let's keep them in cages and show them around," he suggested. They'd be worthless as pets, but they'll do nicely as horrible examples."

That, children, is exactly what happened. First, thousands and thousands of people came out of the mountains and deserts and forests where they had been hiding for years. Then Ivan and Scientist Gugov found out how to switch off the Malenkov Curtain — it was really quite simple when more than one genius got to work on it — and we made the acquaintance of the rest of the world. And now, whenever anyone starts to tell anyone else what to do, well, they tell us about it, and we bring the cages around and remind them.

And so, Emily dear, that answers your question. Those in the cages are different from all the nice people you know — that's why the big snarly one with the whiskers said those awful things to you. He still wants to tell everyone else what to do. And he simply *hates* cats, Emily dear. Kittens, too.

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Jay Williams spent his twenties as a night-club comic, a theatrical press-agent, a stage manager and a soldier. When he finally turned to writing, he rapidly made up for lost time: in a little over 13 years he has published 13 books, ranging from a songbook through juvenile mysteries to historical novels which Samuel Shellabarger has called "authentic and memorable"; he has sold countless stories and articles to the best slick and quality markets; he has written the narrative and lyrics for 13 discs by Young Peoples' Records . . . in short, I don't know when I've had the occasion to introduce quite such a versatile creator to the readers of F&SF. Mr. Williams lists as one of his chief interests "anthropology, of which I have only a layman's smattering"; but that smattering is enough to enable him to create a fresh and convincing picture of a possible Martian culture in a story serious in theme but captivatingly light-hearted in its telling.

The Asa Rule

by JAY WILLIAMS

THEY HAD ANTICIPATED EVERYTHING for the first men on Mars, except the widgits. They had made preparations for communication with any intelligent beings, for contact with strange bacteria or viruses, for food and water and air and transportation and a thousand other things. But they had never thought of the *ouljit-li*, a name which in the speech of the aboriginal Asa meant simply *nuisances*, and which, in its transformation into *widgit* meant, for men, exactly the same thing.

"The trouble was," said Commissioner Eisenstein, heaving his two hundred pounds about until the sturdy chair beneath him crackled warningly, "we had thought of Mars as a planet, and not as a world."

The earnest young man seated opposite nodded intelligently.

The Commissioner put the tips of his fingers together and peered over them. "I don't know how it happened. The result of oversimplification, I suppose. But we had always thought of Mars as homogeneous: one large sandy desert dissected by canals, one unvarying type of Martian *sapiens*. It's as if we should conceive of our earth as looking like New England and populated only by Yankees. A conception," he

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added, with a sigh, "all too frequently encountered in some circles, I might add. However."

He picked up his glass, swirled it once or twice, and drank from it. In spite of the other man's alert expression, it was clear to the Commissioner that his thoughts were elsewhere. An odd type, Eisenstein said to himself. What in the theatrical world would be known as a *shnook*, a gentle, sweet, mild person who wouldn't hurt a fly. Which made it difficult to think of him being sent here, hardly a gentle or mild place. However, the World Office for Martian Relations had a way of knowing its business; strangely enough, in the midst of what appeared to be bumbling bureaucracy, things got done and often done right. As witness Eisenstein's own appointment to this post, from the relative quiet of an academic chair of Anthropology, a seeming piece of folly which had turned out to be rewarding both to the Commissioner and to WOMR.

Eisenstein shook his head and followed the young man's gaze. "Ah, yes," he said drily, "that's right. You haven't met my secretary yet. Come in, Lucy. This is Leonard Jackson. Mr. Jackson, Lucy Ironsmith."

Leonard sprang to his feet, something a man of his composition never should have done, for he was tall, loose-jointed and awkward and his feet were very large. There was an uncomfortable pause while the service unit rolled out, righted the small table, sucked up the broken glass, and with its air-hose dried the floor and Leonard's front. When it had returned to its position in the corner, he stammered, "I'm awfully sorry. I've always been — I mean, I ought to watch what I'm doing. I wasn't looking, I mean."

"Oh, I don't know," the Commissioner rumbled comfortably. "You were looking, and I'm sure I can't blame you."

Lucy Ironsmith — the name was a translation for convenience's sake — was worth looking at. She was not beautiful as a model or an actress is beautiful, but she was slender and tough, a striking and capable woman. She had the clear, pale green skin and silvery hair so typical of the equatorial Martians, and her eyes, oval and dark crimson, were quick to sparkle with anger or pleasure.

She slapped the Commissioner familiarly on the shoulder, and said, in pleasantly accented English, "Enough, Sam. Mr. Jackson will think we have no manners whatever, here." She touched arms with Leonard and threw herself into a seat. "WOMR?" she asked.

"Mr. Jackson has been sent to study the ecology of the tundra," the Commissioner said. "With especial reference to possible parasites of the widgit."

"Widgit control? That sounds to me like one of the Tasks of Var-am."

"Eh?" said the Commissioner.

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"Oh, yes. We have a parallel myth. The Labors of Hercules. Quite true, it does. It is a fascinating thing to me," he went on, reaching for another drink, as the service unit silently answered his beckoning finger, "how in some ways the same myths have appeared on both our worlds. I have found this to be the case where parallel rituals arose, as a result of certain similarities in group responses to environ — Oh, please excuse me, Mr. Jackson. I have not yet succeeded in shaking off my past."

"Not at all," Leonard said. "I'm really very interested in all sorts of things, and particularly in getting to know as much as I can about Mars. I wanted to ask Miss Ironsmith — er — by the way, is it *Miss?* I mean, are you married?"

Lucy blushed a delicate brown, and for a moment her lips were pressed tight together. Then her face cleared, and she laughed.

But the Commissioner, obviously very upset, had wallowed up out of his chair, and said to her, "I abase myself — *Un llam deolg.* Please forgive his impertinence." And to Leonard he said sternly, "You must apologize. Your question, I know, was lightly meant by our standards, but by the standards of Miss Ironsmith's people it was in shocking taste. It was the equivalent of asking a well-brought-up young lady from, say, Akron, Ohio, whether she is a prostitute."

"Oh, my God!" Leonard cried. "I didn't — I'm sorry. I'm really terribly sorry, Miss Ironsmith."

"It was nothing. You have not been long in our world, and I certainly couldn't expect you to learn all the customs of all the peoples of Earth." She caught herself. "Ah! You see? Now it's my turn to ask forgiveness. For we call *our* world Earth in our language, and I often forget, when I translate."

"Well, then we're all friends," the Commissioner said, puffing out his cheeks. "Now then, Mr. Jackson. You said you plan to be here for several months, collecting and surveying. I must ask you to spend your first few weeks, at least, learning the customs and a little of the language of the Asa, the people of the tundra. You evidently have a deep-rooted investigatory streak, and it is just possible that you may offend without meaning to. And the Asa, I must tell you, are in some ways a grim and severe people."

Leonard sighed. "I'll do the best I can," he said.

Lucy, with a smile, made the little gesture which among her people signified reconciliation. "And I," she said, "will be your teacher."

Leonard went off to the rooms assigned to him, a corner apartment with two large windows looking towards the low, humpbacked hills. The sun was setting, and the slender, glossy brown leaves of the stunted trees that covered the plains for a hundred miles around were snapping shut, revealing patches of ocherous

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earth beneath. He was a tangle of emotions, chiefly self-condemnation, annoyance, and curiosity; he was wondering just how old Miss Ironsmith was, and whether her affections were unattached.

That overwhelming curiosity of his was responsible for his being on Mars in the first place.

He was walking with Lucy, the following afternoon, along the stream that flowed near the WOMR establishment — a five-foot fissure in the earth, at the bottom of which a thread of water, almost invisible in the shade of the mosses, tinkled and chuckled — and quite without self-consciousness he explained. "I was always asking questions, when I was a kid: 'Why is this?' 'How does this work?' I grew up with the feeling that if you liked people and were decent to them, and just asked them what you wanted to know, you'd get answers."

"A naive point of view."

"I guess so. Still, most of the time it worked. So one day, at a reception at the University, I was introduced to a man whose name I didn't catch, but I gathered he had something to do with extraterrestrial zoology. He told me about the problem here in the tundra, how the regions of the North Plain, Imun-Asa, were useless to most Martians but valuable to Earth — I'm sorry, I mean *our* Earth — as a field of research. And under the contract with your United Nations — what is it called, again?"

"*Dat-elughar*, the Ten-Fingered Hand."

"Yes, under contract with them we were permitted to set up commissions for study. But we had discovered that the widgits made such study exceedingly difficult. Of course, you know all this. I'm sorry."

"You mustn't be sorry always," Lucy said. "You are weighing yourself down with unnecessary guilt. Oh, I see, it was a form of speech, yes?"

"Yes. Well, I said to him, 'It seems to me you're going about it the wrong way. If you exterminate the widgits it may very well turn out that you'll exterminate something else you don't intend, or somehow upset the balance of things.' He said, 'You just don't understand. It would be like exterminating houseflies. Or mosquitoes.' I said, 'If you succeeded in exterminating all of those, you'd lose many fly-catching birds, bats, and other insects.' He began to get angry, I guess, and shouted something like, 'You just haven't the faintest conception of the problem!' and I said, 'I wish I could take a look at it,' and he suddenly became very calm and quiet, and said, 'Oh? Would you like to do that?' and I said, 'I've always been intensely curious about Mars.' And he said, 'Very well, I think it can be arranged.' "

"Don't tell me his name," said Lucy. "I think I can guess. When he became angry, did his red face

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grow even redder and his white eyebrows clash together like shields? Am I right? Andrew Bulsiter, yes?"

"It was Bulsiter all right. I had to pick the Chief of WOMR for my speeches. Still," and he looked a little more cheerful, "I did get to Mars, which was what I wanted to do."

They left the stream and climbed a little rise. Before them, half a mile away perhaps, were the mounds of the Asa houses, rounded skin tents over the entrances to the underground chambers. A thread of smoke rose in the clear pale sky, and they could hear the bleating of the small goat-like animals the Asa herded.

Lucy said, "But I suppose you must — produce something, hm? Or he will have the upper laugh. Oh, dear, I sometimes get my colloquialisms mixed."

"I know what you mean," Leonard said. "He certainly will."

"But you still feel as you did about people? And you are still curious, in spite of the trouble it got you into?"

"I like everything," said Leonard. He struck his hands together. "I want to *know* — everything I can find out. In our world, there was so much hatred and suspicion, so much that was just the product of people refusing to look each other in the face, honestly and simply, wanting to find out about each other — we are just emerging from that time. On your world, you didn't have so much of that. Martians are simpler than we are in many ways. Take this question of the widgits. Your people in the south, the Hvor, and the other nations, the Garamids, the Osjena, and so on, all had everything they needed in their own regions. They never seemed to have any desire to subjugate other places."

"Oh, in our distant past we fought bitterly."

"Yes, I have read your history. But the Ten-Fingered Hand has been in existence for how long?"

"Two thousand years or so."

"You see? And our United Nations for less than a hundred. Even so, it still has many problems. And none of your people ever tried to do anything about the widgits because you never had any desire to live in the tundra, or conquer it."

"There was nothing here for us," Lucy protested, with a shrug. "The Asa live here and they are happy. The *ouljit-li* don't seem to disturb them; I suppose they have learned how to live with them. Perhaps they even need them. But it is the land of the Asa, not ours, nor the Osjenok, nor anyone else's. Why should we leave our own meadows and ravines?"

"That's what I mean. And biologically there's very little difference between your species and ours; there has even been a certain amount of interbreeding . . . er — well, in any case. Yes. What I'm getting at is that there's no reason why the people of our earth can't

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learn the same kind of friendly, civilized behavior. Some of them did, as a matter of fact: the Hopi, the Navajo, some Polynesian peoples, some of the Africans — and we are all learning it, by degrees."

Lucy put her hands behind her back. Against the dark red collar of her coveralls, her verdigris skin glowed. She said, "I understand you, Mr. Jackson. I think you are right. And brave, too, to believe as you believe, judging by what I have read of your Earth's history, which is to our minds bloody, senseless, and disagreeable." Impulsively, she turned to face him, and in a softer voice she said, "I am without a house, too."

"What?" Leonard said, genuinely puzzled.

"Oh. Of course, you don't know. I am — what you asked me yesterday. Not married."

She turned away from him to hide the blood rising in her cheeks. Before he could answer, she cried, "Your pack!"

He could only gape at her.

She caught his arm. "Quick! The pack you took this morning."

Then he remembered. When they had left the Commission bubble, Eisenstein had buckled a small rucksack over his shoulders, saying, "This is your widgit pack. Lucy will show you what to do with it."

Ineffectually, he tried to reach it. At the same time, he was aware of a faint humming in the air and stopped to stare across the tundra. There was a thin, pale violet cloud, like a dust cloud of an impossible color, spinning over the tops of the foot-high trees.

Lucy clawed his pack off and shook herself out of her own. She snapped open both packs and whipped out two heavy plastic suits. He roused himself sufficiently to put one on. There were gloves that snapped tight around the wrists, and a hood with a fine-mesh respirator. Lucy was already wearing hers. She put her head close to his and in a muffled voice said, "We'd better walk on to the Asa village. The widgits won't come there."

"Why?" Leonard asked.

"I don't know."

"You mean you've never asked the Asa?"

"Oh, yes, we have asked them. Many investigators have asked them. They only laugh, and reply, 'We are their enemies.' "

They plodded on, and all at once the cloud was all about them. It was no longer a cloud, however, but had resolved itself into a myriad tiny insect-like creatures, pink, pale blue, and violet for the most part, with gauzy small wings and round faces on which, curiously enough, the eyes were set together in the front over a small pointed snout. Their bodies were thin and soft and translucent, and when they crawled about they had the habit of stretching themselves out so that it was apparent they could penetrate very

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small spaces. They buzzed and hummed incessantly, and crept about over the surfaces of the plastic suits, tapped against the hoods, clung to the respirators. They were so thick it was almost impossible to see the path, and yet they were each no larger than a housefly. In spite of the suit Leonard found himself slapping at them, trying to brush them away.

He and Lucy stumbled along the narrow path, catching the stout plastic of their suits against branches, slipping in the yellow earth. Once Lucy went to her knees. Leonard yanked her up. The high-pitched, insistent whining of the creatures, even through the hoods, made conversation impossible, and indeed, made even coherent thought difficult. Through the transparent material of his hood, Leonard saw them clustered on his arms and legs like swarming bees; they crawled over the hood and stared round-eyed into his face. He caught himself staring back, and blundered into the tree-shrubs.

He had reached the point where he was beginning to convince himself that he could feel them tickling his arms and legs in spite of the suit — indeed, his whole body itched and tingled, as one does when someone says he has just killed a flea — when, without warning, the widgits were gone, every one; in the distance, behind him, the violet cloud vanished over the horizon. Leonard found himself at the edge of the Asa village with Lucy holding his arm, whether to support him or herself wasn't clear.

The Asa themselves, tall, almost hairless men with coarse gray skins and flat noses, stood silently about. One or two held war-flails, but their leaders, the two young ritual brothers who were chosen every seven years to rule the village, stepped forward and patted their stomachs in sign of welcome.

Lucy removed her hood and gloves, and in their own tongue thanked them.

"Why do you thank us, Secretary?" said one of the brothers. "We have done nothing."

"But we are safe here from the *oulJit-li*."

"If your cloak shelters you from the snow, do you thank the cloak?"

The other brother said, "You are always welcome, in any case. Who is this man?"

Lucy introduced Leonard, who stepped forward to touch arms with the brothers. They at once stepped back.

"You must not touch them," Lucy said. "They are — what would you say? — *uthvul* . . . tabu."

Leonard contented himself with a bow. The brothers, glancing at each other, bowed back. One of them came close to Leonard and looked into his eyes. He said something to the other.

Lucy translated; "He says you have good eyes. They like you."

"Tell them," said Leonard, "that

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I am grateful. I would like to be able to visit them."

The brothers replied gravely that he might come whenever he liked.

They led the way to the center of the village, pushed up the flap of a tent, and conducted Lucy and Leonard down hard-packed earthen steps into a hemispherical chamber some ten feet below the ground. A wood fire smoldered in the center with a spicy smell. A couple of elderly men brought in bowls of what looked like curdled milk and flat meat-cakes. The brothers each took a bowl. One, pouring drink into a cup, offered it to Leonard.

"*Kurdush-ve, im ve tver sukh'ma,*" he said.

The second brother offered the cakes and repeated the sentence.

Lucy whispered, "You must accept the food and reply, '*U tver uz.*' "

Leonard did so. The brothers then repeated the ritual with Lucy, and themselves gravely sat down. They ate and drank together, and then the brothers turned their backs.

"Now we must go," said Lucy. "They are about to sleep, and among the Asa no one must watch a man while he is sleeping, lest he take away his power, his life force you might say."

"Can I come back tomorrow?" Leonard asked.

"Yes, whenever you like. But you'd better begin learning a little of their language."

They climbed the stairs and left the village, which appeared, except for threads of smoke rising from holes in the ground, to be lifeless. As they walked back to the stream, carrying their hoods but still wearing their suits, Leonard said, "What was the prayer they said?"

"Before we ate? It means, 'As I wish for myself, so I give to you.'."

Leonard nodded. But it wasn't until they were at the air-lock of the commission bubble that he suddenly said, "Of course! It is the Golden Rule, isn't it? Do unto others, and so on. I thought the Commissioner said they were stern and violent people."

"I don't remember that he said 'violent'," Lucy said. "Still, I have read much in the history of your earth, and I believe your Christians had such a precept, yet they were also in some ways both stern and violent."

Later that evening, remembering the Commissioner's love for ethnic parallels, Leonard told him the story. Eisenstein, lolling in his favorite chair and watching the shadows cast by the single moon then in the sky, nodded. "I know about it. There are other similarities, too. After all, given the development of life on a not-too-dissimilar world, and assuming that it is an oxygen-carbon life that evolves eventually into a manlike creature — really a quite efficient enough form when you come to think of it — one can also assume that the basic drives of communities of such creatures would be much the same.

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"The Asa are grim and hard, but not in the way you assume. That is, they are not cruel; on the contrary, they live by a rigid rule in which they must love and assist each other and even their worst enemies. They have a saying, '*Ardzil-le ur ghaurna tve*,' — 'Love even those who strike you.' But life is harsh in the tundra: the Asa have nothing but their *nours*, those small grazing animals you saw, some edible mosses, and the tree-shrubs on which they depend for firewood, building materials, and edible bark. They are a semi-nomadic people, and like some other nomads whose life is hard, they have a strong sense of justice. There are specific punishments for specific crimes, and they never vary nor is there any appeal from them."

He uncrossed his legs and pressed a synthetic cigar against the chair lighter. "Do you know what would have happened to you if you had touched one of the kings?"

Leonard shook his head.

"With tears in their eyes, with words of sorrow — not hypocritical, I assure you — they would have beaten you to death with their flails. 'A touch for a touch,' they would have said."

Leonard nodded. "I see their point," he murmured. He accepted a drink and a cigarette from the service unit, which announced in its small monotone, "News broadcast in ten minutes."

"No, thank you," said Leonard.

Lucy said, "I don't think I ever heard anyone say 'thank you' to a machine."

Leonard grinned.

"I think it is very nice," she added, firmly.

"And what do you think after your brush with the widgits?" Eisenstein asked.

"I can understand what's involved, now," Leonard replied. "I still get the shivers when I remember it. Of course, I'd studied everything available on them, and looked at the pictures and the models, but it's not the same thing. I knew that their persistence can drive men insane, and I knew that their bites may eventually cause death. But I couldn't really appreciate it until we went through the swarm."

"And they are the most elusive creatures in the world when you want them," Eisenstein said. "Of course, they've been collected and classified, but no one has ever been able to study them. You know that in captivity they simply die; they will not, like other insects, accept an artificial environment. And so far, no one has been courageous enough to study them in their natural habitat."

"Mm. The thought of being among them without the protection of a suit is frightening. They never leave you once they've found you, do they? And I can see how research inside a widgit suit would be difficult."

"Yes," Eisenstein agreed. "Im-

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agine Fabre doing his entomological studies in such an outfit! We have used widgit-proof machines, traveling laboratories really, but they're dreadfully expensive and cumbersome as well. You can imagine: such a machine needs television equipment, scoops, diggers, water, food, measuring instruments, almost a whole spaceship! Even so, not long ago we had a tragedy here. I can't imagine how it happened, but somehow, perhaps through an exhaust, or through one of the air filters, widgits entered one of the lab-tanks. The things aren't chitinous, you know, like our insects, and consequently they can squeeze through the damnedest spaces . . . in any case, the lab's signal came in about noon, our time, and an hour later the jet was back with the crew. Even in that short time, two of the men had to have psych treatment, and a third was dead. You know, the saliva of the little beasts stimulates the leucocytes: a kind of galloping leukemia. Luckily, it doesn't happen to everyone in that short a time."

He shook his head. Leonard, leaning forward, said, "But the Asa aren't troubled by them. What's their secret?"

"I wish I knew."

"Why not simply hire teams of Asas —"

"Asa-li," Lucy corrected automatically.

"—Asi-li — well, why not have teams of them —"

"—accompany our men in the field," Eisenstein finished for him. "We thought of that, believe me. But the Asa aren't interested. They simply won't do it."

He chuckled. "They told us they had enough work of their own to do. And what could we hire them with? They say we have nothing they want. But I think it goes deeper than that. You see, the widgits are sacred. So the Asa have resisted all our efforts to destroy them. By the terms of our contract, we can't oppose them or interfere with them."

"Sacred insects?"

"It isn't so strange. Among the Australian bushmen the witchetty grub, the larva of an acacia beetle, is sacred. There is a whole clan of men who, at certain seasons, perform a ritual of the grub and ceremonially eat it. And the Egyptians held the dung beetle in reverence, you remember, while among the Zuñi the dragonfly is a totem insect."

Leonard said, "It is hard to imagine anyone trying to eat a widgit."

"I won't go so far as to say they eat them. But there is a ritual of some sort every month, held by the widgit society, the Women of the Ouljit-li. In about a week, I think, they perform it again."

"I'd like to see that," Leonard said soberly.

"So would I, so would a lot of anthropologists," said Eisenstein. "Unfortunately, it is held in great secrecy."

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"I wonder —" Leonard began, but Lucy interrupted.

"Don't even *think* that."

"How do you know what I was thinking?" he said, in surprise.

"I know," she said, "what your curiosity can get you into."

They both laughed, and Eisenstein, at first laughing with them, fell silent and looked from one to the other of the young people, tapping his chin thoughtfully.

And on the morning of the eighth day after that, Leonard was missing.

He had gone off to his apartment the night before, a little earlier than usual, claiming that he had some notes to put in order. There was no alarm nor any indication that he was gone until late in the morning, when a team left the bubble to do some excavating and discovered that the OPEN signal at a side door had been disconnected.

Lucy and Eisenstein knew at once where he had gone.

"I can't tell you how serious this is," the Commissioner said. His moon-face was grave, and he strode up and down the long glass-walled chamber that served him as living room and office, twisting his hands together behind his back. "There's no question that he spied on the widgit society rites. Do you know what the punishment is for that?"

"Yes," said Lucy. "Since he has offended the widgits, he will be given to them. The Asa will take him to a secret place and leave him there, unprotected. But we must do something, Sam."

"I simply cannot use force against the Asa. It would be a violation of our contract. I can't go against their laws, either." He looked at the wall chronometer. "In any case, it may be too late by now."

He stopped before her and took her by the arms. "Lucy, my dear, I don't know what to tell you. If they caught him last night, by now —"

"By now you think he is a screaming madman." She broke away from him. "I don't believe it." Her crimson eyes flashed, and she thrust out her jaw.

"You don't want to believe it."

"Nonsense." Abruptly, she burst into tears. She wept passionately for exactly one minute, then stopped, blew her nose, and wiped her eyes. "You think I am a hysterical female, like one of those in Dickens, or the romances of Creuth Dedan. Well, if you have no more to do than walk up and down here until you wear a river in the floor, do so. I'm going to the village."

"I'll go with you," Eisenstein said, moodily. "I don't know why. Well, I'll have to make a formal protest, anyway. Come on."

They strapped on widgit packs, but they took the Commissioner's closed tricycle which, with its tiny motor and narrow wheelbase, could cover the distance along the path in minutes. At first, Eisenstein considered taking along some of the

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station personnel, but he decided against it; he knew very well that no show of force would be enough to overawe the Asa.

The village appeared, as usual, to be deserted except for two or three boys watching the herds. But as soon as Eisenstein and Lucy had dismounted from the tricycle, the two kings appeared from their house and from other houses came the rest of the village, the women in their dark hoods and cloaks in the rear, the men in an impassive circle around the visitors.

The Commissioner made the sign of greeting, which the brother kings returned.

"You have come about the man with good eyes," said one.

"We have," Eisenstein replied. "Where is he?"

"We have given him to the *ouljit-li*. Where he may be now, we do not know."

"He was not yours to punish," Eisenstein said. "He is a citizen of our Earth. You should have given him to me."

The two kings looked at each other. Then one of them said, "Tell me, he was a man, was he not?"

"Of course."

"Then he was not yours, nor ours. He belonged only to himself. If that is so, he broke the law of his own will and deed. Hence, his punishment came upon him."

Eisenstein bit his lip and stared around the circle of men. They showed neither approval nor disapproval, but only watchful interest. For them, the matter had already been decided. He looked at Lucy out of the corner of his eye. She had the determined, angry air he had come to know after more than a year with her in the station; he knew that her mind was made up to some sudden deed, and he wished he knew what it was. Although the Asa had no visible weapons, he did not doubt they could produce them if necessary.

He said, desperately, "Perhaps that is so. But Jackson meant no harm. He did not intend to violate any of your secrets."

"You speak," said one of the kings, "as if he were our enemy, as if we had punished him out of rancor or hatred. It is not so. If the Women of the Ouljit-li are watched by any man when they perform their ceremonies, the trees will die. Everyone knows this. Therefore, it is ordained that the *ouljit-li* must decide whether to destroy him or not."

"That's a pure quibble," said Eisenstein, but without conviction. He had been one of those excellent anthropologists who can identify himself with the people he is studying, and in this case, although he liked Leonard and wanted to rescue him, he knew in his heart that reason and justice were on the side of the Asa. It was Lucy, however, who ended the discussion.

In a flat voice, she said, "Look at this, you Brothers."

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From the pocket of her coverall she had produced a small, flat, wicked-looking Loeg automatic, such as was used in her country for killing wire-snakes and other small game. One arm she had crossed over her body, the wrist of the other hand resting on it, the butt of the weapon against her stomach, the muzzle pointed at the two kings.

"You know what this is," she said.

One of the kings replied calmly, "It is a light-weapon. We have seen them."

"You know that I can kill one of you without touching you. So I will not be breaking the law."

"We know."

"If I kill one of you, the other must die also. Then the people will die, for the herds will no longer produce, nor the mosses grow."

Eisenstein held his breath. He had never before seen Martians threaten each other with violence. In spite of the quiet tones of Lucy and the kings, the atmosphere was charged with tension. The Asa did not move nor speak, and this too lent a dreadful suspense to the moment; if they had chattered or shouted imprecations, he would have felt better. But there was no sound from any of them, nothing but the rush of breathing of half a hundred people, and across the space in the center the soft, taut voices of the three.

Lucy said, "The man, Jackson, was my . . . friend. And it is said, 'Do all for your friend.' Tell me where he is."

"We cannot tell you that. But we think he must surely be dead —" The king who was speaking, glanced at the sun. "If they had spared him, he would have returned by now. Who can say where a man goes when he dies?"

"Then," said Lucy, in a cold, brittle voice such as Eisenstein had never heard her use, "I will kill you."

The kings eyed her without emotion. Then one said, equally coldly, "That may be so. But you will die also. For the law requires that whoever injures the herds or mosses, must die. And if you kill one of us, you will be doing that injury."

"Yes," said Lucy. "And it is also said, 'Even give your life for your friend.' "

Her voice broke. The weapon in her hand trembled, and steadied again. Eisenstein braced himself. Then, he sprang. Like many fat men, he was much swifter than he looked, and he dropped on Lucy like a meteorite. He wrapped one arm around her, and twisted as they fell together so that she came uppermost, but he held her tight against his chest.

"Let go — !" she gasped. The automatic fired, sending a dazzling golden spear straight up into the air. There was a smell of ozone. Lucy fought furiously to bring the gun lower, to point it at the kings. But Eisenstein had her hand in a grip like a vise, and the weapon dropped to the ground.

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At the same moment, they all heard the voice shouting, "Hey! Wait! Hey!"

Eisenstein let go of her. Prudently, he snatched up the automatic and dropped it into his pocket. Then he helped her up. "Sorry," he muttered.

Lucy was not looking at him. Over the rise, just beyond the village, Leonard had appeared. He was scratched and dirty but apparently uninjured. He ran panting into the village and the people opened a way for him. Then, at last, they began to murmur; many of them smiled, and many touched their fists together in the sign of approval. The kings, too, smiled and nodded. Leonard shot a hasty glance at Eisenstein, and then looked at Lucy.

"I'm sorry," he said. Then he grinned apologetically. "Just a figure of speech. I didn't mean to cause any trouble. But it was worth it."

Lucy did not begin to weep, as an Earth girl might have done, nor did she show any other visible sign of relief. Having assessed the situation — that Leonard was still alive — she adjusted to it at once. She said only, "I'm glad."

Eisenstein said, "The widgits didn't bother you. I don't —"

"I'll explain later. Excuse me." Leonard turned to the brother kings. In intelligible Asak, but with an atrocious accent, he said, "*Ardzille ur ghaurna tve.* That's right, isn't it?"

The kings touched their fists together.

"Come on," Leonard said to Eisenstein. "I've got a report to write out."

"There was actually no clue at all in the ritual of the widgit society," he said later, as they sat over coffee in Eisenstein's office. "I'll tell you about that in detail — as much as I can, anyway — some other time."

"How did you get into it?" Eisenstein asked.

"Well, you know, we visited the village every day for the past week. I saw how the women dressed, in hoods and cloaks so that almost nothing could be seen of them. I made myself a similar outfit and wore it. Once in the village, it wasn't hard to find out where the ceremony was being held: the chanting carried up the smoke holes.

"However, I didn't last long; they caught me almost at once. They turned me over to the kings. One of the kings said that phrase to me — you know, the one you told me the night Lucy and I first went to the village. He said it three times, and I assumed that he meant they didn't hold anything against me, but were simply punishing me because that was the law.

"They held me in one of the chambers until daybreak. Then they took me out into the tundra. We came to a big dark rock that rises right out of the earth, in a valley two or three miles away — I don't

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know, I'm just guessing at the distance."

"I know the rock," Eisenstein said. "They call it the House of Tykh."

"They tied me up with a leather cord that was knotted one hundred and twelve times. I know. I unknotted it. Then they left me alone.

"I was scared, you know, scared and cold. I had a pretty good idea that the widgits would be along in a minute or two. And the temperature must have been down around freezing, but I was sweating. At the same time, however, I was thinking about a lot of things. I was thinking, for instance, about what the widgits were for. Do you know what I mean? They couldn't just exist, they had to have some place in the ecology of this region. I don't know what it is, but I wondered whether it might not have something to do with pollinating these shrub-like trees. Because — I'm no anthropologist, but it occurred to me that rituals around sacred animals must exist because the animals are important to the lives of the people who hold them sacred."

Eisenstein snapped his fingers. "Of course! 'The trees will die.' One of the kings said that."

"Mm. Might be worth investigating, then."

"Well, go on."

"Well, the widgits showed up within five minutes or so. At first, it was bad — very bad." He grimaced, shaking his head. "I can understand how they drive men mad. I've never experienced anything like it, and I've been in some pretty awful holes. Mosquitoes, black flies, gnats, chiggers, whatever you can think of, all rolled into one wouldn't touch them. They crawled all over me; I inhaled them, swallowed them, had them in my ears, in my scalp, down my shirt collar. And they buzzed steadily, worse than the whine of a mosquito, worse than a swarm of hornets. It's a high-pitched, aggravating note: indescribable."

"All right, don't try to describe it," Eisenstein said, impatiently. "Get on."

"Yes. They bite, too, you know, and the bites itched fiercely. But at the same time — it's hard to explain, but — well, I don't know if you know it, but I'm a very curious person."

"I was aware of that," Eisenstein said.

"Oh. Well, I more or less resigned myself to insanity and death, and I thought I might as well take advantage of the fact that I was surrounded by widgits, to study them. I began looking closely at them, to see just how they used the proboscis, how they walked, how they changed size. And you know — hm — I don't know how to say this, exactly —"

He scratched his chin and laughed sheepishly. "They're cute."

"What?" Eisenstein shouted.

And, "Cute?" said Lucy in bewilderment.

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"It's a fact. They have a way of bobbing their heads at each other as if they were bowing. And they look up at you with those round solemn eyes, like drunken owls. I don't know how you feel, but I've always loved owls: I think they're funny and wise and pompous and foolish all at once. And these things looked like miniature owls.

"It's funny, but as soon as I felt that way, suddenly the widgits were gone. The whole cloud of them soared away over the rock and disappeared.

"That jolted me. Then, you know, I began to think. Suppose the widgits react to an aura, a smell perhaps, or a telepathic emanation, or a change in body temperature — I don't know what. But suppose whatever it is, it indicates to them their victims — or their enemies. If you like them and want them, you're an enemy and they vanish. If you hate them and try to avoid them, you must be legitimate prey. That would be why the king had told me so seriously, 'Love even those who strike you.' Makes sense, doesn't it? And it explains why when people wanted to collect the widgits they could never find them, and even the few they got died in captivity — they were surrounded by unfriendly smells or thoughts and couldn't escape from them."

Eisenstein rubbed his face. "Then you mean, the Asa's charm against widgits consists in their simply liking the things?"

"I know it. The reason I was so late is that I couldn't resist practicing. First, I concentrated on hating them, and inside of two minutes they had come back. As soon as they arrived, and began humming around my face, I thought how owlish and amusing they looked, and what nice pets they'd make. Away they went again. I did it half a dozen times, and then I suddenly realized that you would probably be looking for me. So I untied the hundred and twelve knots and began running back here."

Eisenstein rocked back in his chair. " 'Love your enemy,' " he said. "A new sort of insect repellant."

He got up. "Excuse me for a minute," he said. "I'll put a call in to Central Headquarters. You can tell them about it, and dictate your report through."

Left alone, Leonard and Lucy sat in silence. Then, at last, he said uncomfortably, "I certainly don't want to violate any more customs. Uh — what does one usually say to — er — to a girl who has no house?"

"Why," Lucy said brightly, "it's one more of those interesting parallels that Sam loves to find in our two civilizations. You say, 'May I kiss you?' "

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The Science Screen

by CHARLES BEAUMONT

THERE IS AN UNFORTUNATE NOTION widespread to the effect that if one is to write convincingly of harem life one must spend twenty or more active years in a seraglio. I don't agree. Though I grant that it would depend largely upon the individual reporter, his powers of observation, his stamina and his spirit, I feel a month ought to be quite sufficient. As it happens, this is exactly how long I was inside — really *inside* — a motion picture studio, and I honestly don't think there is much more I could have learned. At least upon one subject: science fiction films. And so I propose to risk criticism and make a few rash statements.

It used to be that whenever strangers would stop me on the street, seize my lapels and bark, "Hey, buddy, how do they ever make those science fiction movies, anyway?" I would answer, "How, indeed?" or simply shrug and hurry off. That was prior to December, 1955. Now it is all different; for I have written a s.f. film and it is going to be produced and people are going to look at it. And I believe I can take care of the question: How are they made?

The hard way.

Perhaps F&SF readers would be interested in some of the things I learned at Universal-International. It is all confidential stuff, but absolutely true (however incredible it may sound, and it will) and I pass it along without ornamentation. If there is a moral, I leave it for others to uncover. . . .

I arrived at the studio ill at ease, jumpy, and, recalling past events, thoroughly convinced that the entire project would fold. I'd invested in an appropriate costume (tweed jacket with leather elbow-guards; bright red sox; Hawaiian sport shirt; silk scarf with battling-amoebae design; etc.) but lost courage at the last instant and appeared instead in my usual drab street attire. The guard took my name. "Beaumont? Beaumont?" He held me with an Arctic glare; then he grunted. "Oh, yeah. Go on in. That big building over there, that's for writers. You're in room 13." Room 13 turned out to be luxurious, large and cold. There was an immense oak desk by the north window. Against the far wall, a couch of English leather. An easy chair. And, as expected, two dozen No. 1 pencils, all sharpened to fighting points, and several pads of lined paper. And a telephone.

I stood there, feeling trapped,

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when a young woman entered and announced herself as my secretary. She adjusted the air-conditioning unit, examined the pencils critically, smiled, and inquired if I had anything for her to do. I told her no, not right at the moment but stand by. She smiled again and went into the next room.

Two hours later my producer phoned and said that tomorrow we'd "kick the thing around." Meanwhile, I should think.

For the rest of the day, I thought.

The following morning I had the first of approximately eighteen thousand story conferences. It was decided that we should call the picture THE MAN WHO COULDN'T DIE and that the story ought to have something to do with an immortal man, that is, a man who couldn't die.

I returned to my office, still a bit shaky, and stared at the pencils. I tried one, experimentally, and found that it was excellent for shading in shadow on circles if you used it lightly. At five thirty I went home and typed out a plot. It was pretty good.

Next day I submitted it, the producer threw it out, and we began work.

Of the final motion picture treatment, I can only say that it had a Universal theme. The corn was high, but handled with some imagination; it could, I felt, make an exciting horror job. At least it was not an affront to average intelligence. And though it was far from what it could have been, there were a few interesting things, and a nice old-time flavor to it all.

I went home to await final word.

It never came. Through acquaintances I learned that the VIP's were all delighted with the treatment (to the extent that they OK'd production) but that THE MAN WHO COULDN'T DIE was a "big" picture and it would never do to entrust a big picture to a *science fiction* writer, especially one without a dozen or so credits.

So the screenplay was turned over to Mr. Curt Siodmak. To no one's surprise . . .

Incidentally, s-f is red hot at U-I. I learned from a reliable source that THE CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON outgrossed THE GLENN MILLER STORY, and so creatures are now at a premium. (They have two more gill man films in the can and one in the works.) TARANTULA, for example. It was submitted by a young unpublished writer named Robert Fresco in two-page synopsis form and purchased at once. Fresco did the first draft and it was then turned over to Martin Berkeley for final work. Mr. Berkeley, who is a pleasant, pipe-smoking veteran (responsible for some forty successful pictures, including many of the Dr. Kildare series), freely admitted to me that he loathes science fiction, doesn't understand it, and cannot guess why they keep assigning him to this sort of thing. Still, TARANTULA was the Number One film in sev-

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eral cities, and he had a hand in it, so he — not Fresco — was immediately put onto THE DEADLY MANTIS. This picture will be almost identical to its predecessor, except that the creature is a giant mantis. (According to Mr. Berkeley, he and his producer spent many hours at the Los Angeles County Museum trying to find a suitable menace; once that was decided upon, attention turned to the story. Richard Matheson, at U-I finishing up THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN, suggested that next time they try a giant bluebottle fly, but Mr. Berkeley said no, flies are not horrifying enough; I suggested a giant cockroach, but cockroaches are *too* horrifying.)

A movie called THE MOLE PEOPLE is in preparation, also. This was written by Mr. Lazslo Gorog, around an original idea by William Alland. Gorog, a prominent television scenarist, concurred with Berkeley's opinion of s.f., but confessed he'd read practically nothing in the genre . . . "except, of course, Mr. Bradbury." He, too, was at a loss to explain why he in particular was chosen for the assignment, but was not unhappy for he had come up with "a very exciting script." Somehow — I can't remember how — he'd managed to work in Atlantis, or Mu, and this pleased everyone, because it gave the story an extra dimension.

A script titled THE LOST VALLEY had just been completed upon my arrival, and I understand it has not one but *twelve* creatures, all unspeakably hideous. It is all about a valley "forgotten by time . . ." There was also a project temporarily called SPACE GIRLS in operation, and another known as THE NAKED WORLD or THE GREAT GREEN OG, but I think these have been abandoned, on the theory that the public would be getting too much of a bad thing.

Richard Matheson's THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN is still intact, but there are rumblings of casting Tony Curtis in the lead.

In summation: In the entire time I spent at U-I, I did not encounter one person, either writer or producer, who would admit to even a vague fondness for science fiction; indeed, they all rather proudly declared that they "hate the crud, but it's what the people want" and made no bones about their hope that the "fad" will disappear so they can get back to good movies.

And that, my friends, is how science fiction motion pictures are made.

Happily, I speak for only one studio. That this does not hold true for all others is well demonstrated by an almost perfect fantasy, THE NIGHT MY NUMBER CAME UP (J. Arthur Rank). Here is a genuine sleeper (second-billed in Los Angeles with an atrocity called THE BENNY GOODMAN STORY), made with fine restraint, utter honesty and obvious love by the estimable Michael Balcon, and bidding fair to be the

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picture of the year. The story is supposedly based on "fact," that is, it was published in the form of an article, and is capable of numerous interpretations; but I think there can be no quarrel with its inclusion in this column, for one of the interpretations is that it is straight fantasy. Not that it's terribly important, anyway, for the plot is hoary: A man has a vivid dream about an aircraft's crash, then watches as his dream comes true in every detail. What *is* important is the treatment of this idea, and that is where the picture takes on value. R. C. Sheriff has written an altogether brilliant screenplay, in which the central theme — that of predestination — is explored from just about every angle; also, he has imbued his characters with intelligence and motivation, given them life, so that we care very much what happens. Through these characters the story becomes suspenseful from the outset and in little time moves onto the same high plateau occupied by WAGES OF FEAR and DIABOLIQUE. For the people are adult and reasonable. Sheriff has not allowed them (as most Hollywood scenarists would do) to scoff loudly after the coincidences become uncomfortable. They're scared. But, because they have important missions which absolutely require their taking this particular plane, and because they are intelligent enough to understand the gravity of allowing a man's dream to influence them, they press on — until it is too late. When there is no longer any doubt whatever, we are as terrified as they are.

The director, Leslie Norman, is clearly one of Britain's most gifted craftsmen. He has made none of the mistakes which are so easy in this sort of film (see THE HIGH AND THE MIGHTY), and keeps his camera moving enough so that we never feel constricted — even though a great deal of the picture's footage takes place inside the plane. Additionally, he is well aware of the importance of individual scenes, and never permits a "paragraph" that does not in some way advance the story. The result — the opposite of, say, THE PRISONER — is a tight, straightforward, uncluttered film, which builds constantly, with *quiet* rather than *dull* sections to underscore the dramatic moments.

The acting is excellent. Michael Redgrave, Sheila Sim and Denholm Elliott all do fine jobs, but it is Alexander Knox who steals the show. Which is legitimate dramaturgy, for he plays the most absorbing passenger and the one with whom everyone is bound to empathize.

If you loved DEAD OF NIGHT (which of course you did) you'll love THE NIGHT MY NUMBER CAME UP.

THE INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS (Allied Artists) is less successful, due mainly to the fact that the producer was never quite sure of either himself or the story. It is a spotty piece of work, some-

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times very good indeed, sometimes poor, generally bearable. Disregarding the beginning and end, which were inexplicably tacked on after the film was finished (and look it), the story is faithful to Jack Finney's original; yet somehow, even when it is most accurate, it never captures the true horror of the book. The first discovery of the nearly completed "pod-duplicate" should have been shocking, frightening, eerie. It isn't. Why? The circumstances are weird enough. Heaven knows — a blank-faced body lying on a table under a dim green light. But the whole thing is fumbled, like a bad British satire. ("I say, I'm glad you dropped by. I seem to have this corpse on my billiard table." "Indeed? Well, let's have a look!") In fact, the fault of the film seems to be the fault of the "pod-people" themselves: it has a perfect set of organs, everything complete, yet there is an indefinable emotionlessness about it, a "walking dead" feeling. You should like it, but you can't.

In the leading role, Kevin McCarthy does an eminently satisfying job, and so does Dana Wynter in her part (though it is hard to believe that anyone would divorce such a creature*). King Donovan is all right as the author, but not outstanding.

The best scenes are those in the square when the entire town has been taken over, and in the doctor's garden where we get our first good look at the pods. The special effects here are wondrous: there has not been anything quite so deliciously disturbing on the screen since Frankenstein's monster was first lowered from the tower. Don Siegel's direction is competent, as is the dialogue by Daniel Mainwaring. Carmen Dragon, on the other hand, contributes the worst musical score in s.f. film history.

One small cheer for this one.

Taken at its intended level, M-G-M's FORBIDDEN PLANET (screenplay by Cyril Hume, on a story by Irving Block and Allen Adler; direction by Fred Wilcox) is surprisingly good. As with most of us, I had listened to the razzmatazz publicity for a year and built up a nice healthy resistance to the film, frankly expecting sort of a combination of CONQUEST OF SPACE and ROBOT MONSTER. As it turns out, the picture is quite consistent with its aim — which is, simply, to entertain — and though there are many flaws (muddy plot development, outrageous padding, heavy dependence upon clichés, occasionally embarrassing dialogue) it would take a very sour reviewer indeed to deny that it is still spanking good fun. The story, except for one startlingly unique twist, is familiar stuff: Space Patrol goes to farflung star system to locate missing expedi-

*A recently released camera portrait of Miss Wynter strongly resembles F&SF's Mildred Clingerman. — A. B.

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tion; mysterious voice warns troops away, but to no avail. The Patrol lands and finds the strange and wonderful world of the extinct super-race, the Krell — a world of mind-staggering technological development. All of the members of the original expedition are dead with the exception of Doctor Morbius (played competently, if a shade resignedly, by Walter Pidgeon) and his daughter, Altaira (Anne Francis). What has happened? Morbius does not know, only that some sort of Evil Force did the others in while leaving him and the girl untouched. Now he is busily engaged in attempting to unlock the secrets of the Krell, and would like nothing better than to wave goodby to the Patrol. The Commander of the ship, however, is reluctant to leave and refuses to do so until specific orders are received from Earth. Enter the Evil Force, in the form of an invisible monster . . . (The unique twist is that the monster is actually the rampageous Id of kindly Dr. Morbius himself, and only with his death can the creature be destroyed. To my way of thinking, a perfectly grand basis for a whole new picture.)

At this point we are offered divertissement. Miss Francis performs what may be described as a Morbius strip (she has never seen an Earthman other than her father and considers the Commander "perfectly lovely!". It gets gooey along about this time, and the possibilities are never really tapped, as they were in the W. C. Fields masterpiece, YOU CAN'T CHEAT AN HONEST MAN. There is also "comic relief" with the ship's cook, but it doesn't last long and "Cookie" is at least an improvement over the standard Brooklynite.

It must be stated at once that all of this is made wholly bearable by the special effects work, which is incredibly good. Walt Disney's studio was employed for this purpose, and the boys outdid themselves. The only fair descriptive word would be *stunning*. In fact, I will go out on a limb and state that Bonestell himself could not have surpassed the genuinely beautiful yet always alien terrain of Altair; and as for the Krell workshops, with their countless gimmicks and gadgets, and the big tunnel which stretches miles below the surface of the planet — these are the finest examples of the art that I have seen to date. The producer, Nicholas Nayfack, explained to me how certain of the effects were achieved, but I am still awed, as you will be.

The picture fairly bursts at the seams with technical triumphs of this sort. The much touted Robby the robot looks silly at first glance, but pretty soon — despite its alarming resemblance to a slot machine — you forget that it is just a thick rubber suit with a very uncomfortable man inside and find yourself charmed by the creation. Anything but charming is the Monster. The

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animators worked nine months to do the single short sequence wherein we get a look at the Id-beast, and I must say that it was no waste of time. The thing looks something like a gigantic, vaguely anthropomorphic lion, something like a fighting bull, a good deal like one of Virgil Finlay's early Lovecraftian inventions, and it is guaranteed to scare the liver and lights out of you.

The musical score is perhaps the most interesting item of all, possibly because it isn't a musical score at all. Louis and Bebe Barron are responsible for the "electronic tonalities" which form the background, and they deserve high praise. These astonishingly versatile sound patterns contribute inconspicuously yet vitally to the other-worldly effect. I suspect we will be hearing more from the Barrons.

FORBIDDEN PLANET'S best moments evoke the innocent old-time wonder of science fiction and are purely delightful; its worst can be forgiven. The kids — for whom, after all, it was made — will stampede to it, and I, for one, propose to join them. I suggest you do, too.

There is no point to reviewing THE DAY THE WORLD ENDED, THE PHANTOM FROM 10,000 LEAGUES or THE ATOMIC MAN. They are all dreadful, amateurish hack jobs, with nothing to recommend them.

Progress Report: Richard Matheson's THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN will have gone into production by the time this column appears. Let us now have a moment of silent prayer that they do not alter his script. Because if they don't, then we will have another classic to stand with KING KONG, DEAD OF NIGHT, 20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA and TILLIE'S PUNCTURED ROMANCE.

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There can hardly be any reader of the English language who does not know C. S. Forester as the creator of Horatio Hornblower and the foremost fictional portrayer of naval engagements (and of the men involved in them). So great is the fame of Hornblower's exploits that Mr. Forester is less celebrated than he should be as a prime pioneer in the realistic ironic murder novel — PAYMENT DEFERRED (1926) was a good two decades ahead of its time, and is still a classic — and scarcely known at all as a deviser of fantasy. This story was originally published as a prize-winning "mystery"; but you'll find it a model in stringent fantasy-logic . . . with not a little of Forester's murderous irony.

Payment Anticipated

by C. S. FORESTER

THE FIRST TIME WALTER HALFORD drove past his grave I was with him. We were driving through that fantastic Los Angeles cemetery which everyone has heard about lately. Halford was at the wheel and his quick eye caught sight of the inscription — I had not seen it. He braked the convertible to a sudden stop (he was a bad driver), and put the car into reverse and backed hurriedly up to the place again. I was too worried by the thought that there might be a car immediately behind us (Halford was not the kind of driver to look behind him before reversing) to take special note of what had attracted his attention; Halford had to point it out to me. It was a very plain tombstone, with a very brief inscription.

WALTER HAMMOND HALFORD
1895–1925

"What a coincidence!" said Halford. "That's my name in full — I've never met any living person with it. Plenty of Halfords, of course, but no Walter Hammond Halford — not even a W. H. Halford. And that's the year of my birth, too. Funny that he and I, whoever he was, had exactly the same name, and were born the same year on opposite sides of the Atlantic. Wonder what he was like?"

"He died young," I said.

"Yes. I hadn't even come to

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America at that time, so there was no chance of our meeting. Unless he was in France with the A.E.F. I met a few Americans in 1918; I might have come across him then, in some *estaminet,* maybe, and not known his name."

"Maybe you did," I said, with all the patience I could muster.

I have never been one to be much intrigued by coincidences — people who exclaim when they meet someone with the same name or the same birthday bore me. And this was someone who died twenty-five years ago. . . .

I forgot all about that tombstone; it was not until some time later that it came back into my memory again. Any thought of it was entirely overlaid by the gradual accumulation of other data about W. H. Halford, far more interesting.

Quite honestly, I did not like him. He struck me as being sly and shifty, although at the same time he was a man of fresh original mind. He was a man of incredibly loose morals, too; at least his conversation would indicate that he was. Not that that is anything remarkable in Hollywood. I do not think we would have become the intimate friends that we did become, if I had not been fascinated by the things Halford told me about himself. Despite our common nationality, which had brought us together in the first place, I think we would have drifted apart and become mere nodding acquaintances, if Halford had not let me into his secret and if Grace Corline had not called my special attention to him.

The first time I saw him gratify a wish was over a trivial matter. Trivial — that word gives the wrong impression; he interfered with the course of Nature, but for a trivial motive. There was a beach party at Santa Monica, and an unseasonable high fog.

"I wish this fog would go away," said Halford, looking up at it casually — he and I were out on the beach together alone.

It took five minutes or so for his wish to be granted, and it happened so apparently naturally that I thought at the time that it was really natural; then came a shift in the wind, and the high fog began to break, and blue sky appeared, and soon the sun was shining down upon us. High fog comes and goes at Santa Monica, quite unpredictably, and the beach party was a very pleasant one in the end. Grace Corline was there, and Halford fell for her, quite obviously. He was a very susceptible man — one could hardly be long with him in Hollywood without knowing that — but women did not like him. Not because he was a gray-haired man in the middle fifties, but because his personality was definitely unpleasing to them. And Grace Corline had plenty of men to choose from, without bothering her head about Halford. She only plays bit parts, but she is as beautiful as any star, and she has

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brains as well. That marks her out in Hollywood society, though not necessarily favorably. Halford made a strong play for her (it was about that time that he told me he never liked the nitwit type of woman) and got nowhere. Grace's attitude towards him was one of cool amusement, which must have been peculiarly aggravating to him.

But he made some impression on her at least, for she spoke about him to me a day or two later.

"I don't like your friend Mr. Halford," she said.

"Acquaintance, not friend," I corrected. "He's only been here a month or two, you know, and I never knew him before."

"Anyway, I don't like him," repeated Grace.

A week or two later she was far more emphatic.

"I *hate* that man Halford," she said to me. "Do you know, dear, I'm almost afraid to go to a party now in case he's there. He spoils everything."

"What on earth does he do?" I asked, somewhat bewildered. I could not imagine a strong-minded woman like Grace allowing her evenings to be spoiled by a man like Halford.

"That's just the point," said Grace, and she betrayed almost as much bewilderment as I did. "He doesn't *do* a thing. Not a thing."

"You mean it's what he says?"

"He doesn't say anything, either. I wish it were. I could deal with that."

"He doesn't do anything, and he doesn't say anything? Do his looks upset you?"

"Yes," said Grace. "I — I suppose so."

"All I can say is, don't look at him then, dear."

"No, you haven't got it right," said Grace. "It isn't what he does, and it isn't what he says, and it isn't his face."

Grace had to pull herself together before she went on.

"That man," she said, solemnly, "*knows* about me."

"Knows?" I exclaimed. "What does he know? D'you mean it's blackmail or something?"

"No, not blackmail. Of course not. He just knows me, inside and out. I can feel he does."

"He hasn't that much sensitivity," I protested.

"He doesn't need it," said Grace. "He doesn't guess. *He knows!*"

"For God's sake, explain," I said.

"You'll think it's silly," said Grace. "I think it's silly, too, but I can't help it. You see, it's like this — Oh, I'll have to give you an example. You remember when I was married to Dick?"

"Yes."

"I was in love with him. Terribly. You remember."

"Yes, I remember," I said.

"It lasted a long time before I found him out. People used to call us an ideal couple."

"Yes."

"Well, during that time he knew

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all about me, of course. He could guess what I was thinking as soon as I thought it."

"Yes," I said, confining myself to agreement so as not to break the thread.

"At parties and places he'd meet my eye and smile at me across the room. You know — you see happy couples do that every day. I'd never held anything back from him, not in any way at all. Not in any way."

"Of course not," I said.

"Well," said Grace, "that man Halford knows me just as well as Dick did. I can feel it. And I hate it."

"Perhaps I'm stupid," I said, when Grace waited for my comments. "But I don't understand at all. Be a bit more explicit."

"Well," said Grace, "this will end in my having to draw you diagrams. Here's what I mean. You've heard of the undressing look?"

"Of course. But don't tell me —"

"It's worse than that. Much worse. I'm used to men trying to guess what I look like with no clothes on. But that man doesn't guess. *He knows!* He knows me as well as if I were madly in love with him and had slept with him every night for a month. If I had a birthmark somewhere — but I haven't — he'd know where it was. And that would be just nothing compared to all the other things he knows about me. About my mind, I mean. My reactions."

"My dear," I said, "do you mind if I say you're as mad as a hatter? That fellow hasn't the brains or the sense or the understanding. I'm taking it for granted that you've never admitted him to any intimacy?"

"Of course not!"

"Never? You've never been drunk or anything?"

"No, never! And if I were drunk to the point of coma I wouldn't, either."

There was no arguing Grace out of her extraordinary conviction. She was quite positive that somehow Halford enjoyed intimacy with her.

"Darn it!" she said. "That pup I bought. I got him so that he could sleep in my bedroom. Just in case —"

That clinched it, in my opinion. If a sane woman like Grace could feel like that about Halford, then Halford was worth analyzing. He was a friendless man — one can be very lonely in Hollywood — and it was not difficult for me to cultivate his friendship and his intimacy. And it called for no special tact, either. He talked freely enough when we dined together, and I saw to it that we did that fairly often. But I waited some time before I brought Grace Corline's name into the conversation.

"Grace?" he said, when at last I mentioned her. "She's a nice girl."

Halford had gray eyes which bulged a little, rather fishy eyes. But I thought at that moment that there was a twinkle in them. A reminiscent twinkle. If he were a cad and had enjoyed Grace's favors.

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he might easily have looked like that. It seemed to me that after that he made a successful effort to control his expression and regain his previous indifference.

"I'd like to know her better," he said.

"Not so easy," I answered. "She's a one-man woman."

"Yes. Someone told me about that ex-husband of hers," said Halford.

That indifference he displayed was pure cunning, I was sure. But I did not report to Grace about what I thought or felt — if she had delusions, I was afraid to encourage them; and if they were not delusions I was afraid anyway. It was a relief when she told me that her tensions about Halford were easing up, and I might have left off troubling about him except that just at that moment I found out more about him. I had a dinner engagement with him for that evening, and it was too much trouble to think of a Hollywood lie to excuse my breaking it. I kept the engagement out of pure inertia, and it was only by chance that Grace's name came into the conversation again.

"Grace?" said Halford, raising his eyebrows above his bulging eyes.

This time it was real indifference. He spoke of her as a man might who was tired of her. It was a coincidence that he should do so just when Grace had told me he had ceased to trouble her thoughts. Anyway, it was all a lot of nonsense, and I was glad I did not have to give it another thought. When we emerged from the restaurant and stood under the marquee it was lashing with rain, and cold and unpleasant, and taxis were scarce. In fact, there was only one, and a youngish man was about to hand a youngish woman into it.

"Hell!" was what I said.

"I wish they'd remember something they've forgotten inside," said Halford.

The youngish woman was just stooping to enter the taxi, and at that moment she straightened up again and spoke to her escort. The two of them spoke to the doorman who was hovering beside them, and then they turned away to go back into the restaurant. The doorman looked at us.

"Yes, we'll have it," said Halford.

We got into the taxi and drove off through the rain.

"That was convenient," I said.

"Wasn't it?" said Halford.

"I'd like to know more about it," I said.

"No reason why you shouldn't, if you're interested," said Halford, and then he was silent until we swung into Hollywood Boulevard. "Here we are. Come in for a drink?"

"Thank you. I'd like to," I said.

We were at his hotel and went up to his apartment. Halford telephoned for whisky and hung up my overcoat, and I was watching him very closely from my armchair. This was just the ordinary world, the world where one talked of

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Hooper ratings and tried to forget about the atomic bomb. It was not a world in which people performed miracles.

"How do you do it?" I asked.

"Just by wishing," said Halford, with a shrug.

"Grace Corline —" I began.

"What has Grace been telling you?" asked Halford, with a decided gleam of interest.

"You tell me first, and then I'll tell you," I countered. "That is, I'll tell you all I can without violating any promises."

At this moment the whisky arrived, and Halford signed for it, passed mine to me, and sat himself down again. I feared the incident would distract him, but it did not. He sipped from his glass, stared into it, and went on talking, looking from the glass to me and back again.

"It started, I think, with *supposing*. Daydreaming. You know — everyone does it to some extent, according to the psychology textbooks. *Supposing* I had a million pounds. *Supposing* I wrote a best-seller."

"Yes. We all do that."

"Well, in my case it usually comes true. Within limits, that is. Pretty broad limits."

"Such as —?"

"They're not so easy to define. There's a distinction between the impossible and the possible. You remember that beach picnic at Santa Monica?"

"Yes," I said. I had forgotten all about it until he reminded me.

"Well, that's a good example. There's nothing impossible about a high fog at Santa Monica dispersing suddenly. There's nothing impossible about two people just getting into a taxi remembering that they've left something behind in a restaurant. I can't work miracles, though."

"They seem good enough miracles to me," I said.

"Do they?" said Halford, with a trace of bitterness. He held up his left hand, crippled by a wound in 1918. "I can't change this, for instance. I can't grow another little finger. I can't knock twenty years off my age, much as I'd like to."

"I understand."

"I don't think you really do. You see, I don't understand it myself. I'm learning new things about it every day. Space and time — these relativity fellows might understand, but I haven't that type of mind, and I can't change my mind any more than I can change my hand."

"But apart from that?"

"Apart from that there's nothing I can't have. Nothing."

"Grace Corline?" I asked.

"That was easy. *Supposing* she were utterly in love with me. *Supposing* — Well, with a girl like Grace that's not quite enough. You said yourself she's a one-man woman. You'd have to be her husband, and not just her secret lover. But then — then there'd be no limits. She'd give everything to a husband she loved. Everything! Body and soul.

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A very pleasant experience. It was for me, at any rate."

"I wish I knew what you are talking about," I said.

"Don't be deliberately obtuse. Grace was my wife — my passionate, devoted bride — for a very happy month. A month is long enough, of course — at least to me."

"But *when?*" I asked. "*When?*"

"Don't ask me," said Halford with a shrug. "I told you I can't work these things out. According to your calendar I suppose it started five weeks ago and ended last week. It was during my spare time, anyway. But when it actually happened is another story."

"If it ever did."

"Yes, if it ever did, I grant you." Halford shrugged again. "But it was good enough for me in any case. It was a very happy time. It's very pleasant to be able to marry and know there'll be no ill feelings afterwards."

"But why go to all that trouble?" I asked, innocently. "Why not merely wish yourself happy?"

Halford scowled a little sulkily.

"That doesn't work," he said. "I can't wish myself happy, any more than I can wish myself a new finger."

It was on the tip of my tongue, even in that unnatural moment, to suggest that was a pretty sure indication that he would never be happy anyway. But I asked a new question instead.

"Have you been able to do this all your life?" I asked.

"Oh, no. It's only been during the last few years, and at first it was very weak and feeble. I didn't even notice it for a long time. And even when I began to suspect it I put the notion away for fear I was going mad — delusions of grandeur, you know."

"I understand," I said. "I can understand that part of it."

"But I gradually became convinced," Halford went on to explain. "Actually, it was impossible not to be convinced. And as soon as I started to make use of it, I acquired greater facility. Just like touch typing. At first it was all very feeble. Getting my publishers to double their advance. That sort of thing. The set-backs I got, before I learned my limitations, shook my confidence."

"I fancy confidence has a lot to do with all this," I said.

"Yes. Undoubtedly. But it's by no means everything. What's more important is that you acquire a certain facility, as I said. I was actually frightened the first time I began to move about in space. And it's only just lately I've begun to move about in time."

"You do *that?*" I demanded.

"Yes. Oh, you needn't believe me, if you don't want to. I don't care if you do or not. But it's easy — easier than a lot of other things, if you want the truth. Those relativity fellows might explain it. Five years or half an hour — it doesn't matter."

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"You could be like Marlowe's Faustus, perhaps?" I suggested, hardly knowing whether I was speaking seriously or not. "Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss. Cleopatra. Eve. Are you going to try them all?"

"Don't be a fool. I can only go back through my own lifetime, of course, getting younger every day."

"I thought you said you couldn't reduce your age?"

"Not permanently, of course. I'm not one of these physicists who can explain these things. I can go back and be young again. But when I come back to this, I'm that much older, all the same. Time goes on and I can't stop it. I can swim against the current, that's all."

"That's terribly interesting," I said. By this time my judgment was reversing itself. Halford was quite insane, I guessed, and I had been observing coincidences and not miracles. "Why don't you get a physicist to work on the problem? Or a psychologist, for that matter?"

"I don't want the problem solved. I'm quite happy with it as it is."

"I've a good mind to talk to Hill about it," I said.

"Well, you could," said Halford, and then he met my glance with a smile. "You talked about Helen. Good thing we're both old fogeys with a classical education, so that you'll understand the allusion. I'll make a Cassandra of you."

"How do you mean?" I asked.

"You can tell anyone you like about this," he said, "and no one will believe you. I'll fix that — there, I've fixed it already. Now go out and tell the world. Tell the Los Angeles *Examiner*, and see what they have to say about it."

"All right," I said. "You win. I won't."

"I've never wished anyone dead yet," said Halford. "Of course I could wish you a heart attack or a perforated appendix. Perhaps that would convince you?"

"I'm convinced," I said, hastily.

The truth is, I was frightened. I was glad to get away from him that evening. But I went on seeing him, of course. The temptation was overwhelming. And he told me a good deal more about himself at different times. I could recount what he told me, but much of it is not relevant, although interesting. What I think is relevant is the fact that he met Augusta Howe. I felt real jealousy when I heard about that, for I am very fond of Augusta. She is a very beautiful woman even now, a woman of wit and a woman of wisdom. Her abilities and her personality are prodigious. She was a star in the silent movie days, and she is a star still. Her fame survived that transition. It survived an even worse ordeal — in the nineteen-twenties a jealous husband caught her with a lover whom he killed in her arms, and even that awful scandal did not wreck her career, although smaller scandals at that time wrecked careers almost as distinguished. People have

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forgotten about it nowadays, at least for most of the time, and when they happen to remember, it is no serious disadvantage; on the contrary, she is still talked about as "The Grand Old Lady of the Stage and Screen," and most people think she must be a sexagenarian — of course, she is nothing of the sort; but it adds to her popularity that people think so.

All this is a digression; the point is that Halford met her. He talked about her to me later.

"I wouldn't like anything to upset Augusta," I said.

"Don't worry," said Halford. "Why should anything upset her?"

When I continued to appear apprehensive he tried to reassure me.

"Whatever's going to happen will happen a long time ago, so to speak," he said with a grin. "She's a wonderful old lady. *Supposing* . . . I expect she was much more wonderful when she was thirty. She must have been marvelous then."

So marvelous that one man killed another for her . . . but I did not pursue the subject. We talked after that about the impermanence of happiness — not a subject that Halford knew much about, for he, I firmly believe, had never known happiness at all, even momentarily. And that was the last time I ever talked to Halford, and it was almost the last time that anyone ever did, for next day he disappeared.

He vanished completely from this life.

He left everything just as it was in his hotel apartment — his clothes, his books, his manuscripts. He left his money in the bank. We waited to hear if some sudden whim had taken him back to England, but we heard nothing at all.

Nothing.

No one has ever heard a word from Halford since that time. . . .

It was only a short while ago that it occurred to me that there was a tombstone in the cemetery with his name on it, and the date 1925. Augusta was thirty in 1925, and it was just at that time that someone was killed in her arms. I have the ridiculous feeling that if that grave were to be opened, the skeleton inside would have a mutilated left hand — with the little finger missing. . . .

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Almost seven years ago, Stuart Palmer appeared in the first issue of this magazine with a biting little item called A Bride for the Devil. *Since then he has been preoccupied with more realistic matters: four novels and many novelets and short stories about the detectival adventures of the incomparable Hildegarde Withers, numerous excellent studies of factual crime, and most recently a mystery novel without Hildy,* UNHAPPY HOOLIGAN, *which is an infectious account of Mr. Palmer's long-enduring love affair with The Circus — in which he has actually served as a performing clown! Now at long last we can welcome him back to fantasy with this delightful tale of a bottle which bears the conventional Seal of Solomon . . . but which contains a quite unconventional occupant.*

Bottle Babe

by STUART PALMER

UNTIL TODAY, A LOVELY SPRING day in late February, bottles had never played much of a part in Hubert Poole's orderly life — at least not since infancy. He had never been what you could honestly call a drinking man, though he used to relish a glass of sherry at faculty teas, and he now enjoyed a mildish highball after dinner. He lived quite alone, pleasantly if unexcitingly, in a little pink house that he had bought in La Jolla, that sun-drenched northern suburb of San Diego, on the very edge of the blue Pacific. He read a great deal, as one might expect of a retired professor of history; he fished in the surf and off the rocks with occasional success; he tried to grow azaleas and camellias in the sour sandy soil of his little garden.

As befitted a widower in his late fifties, Hubert Poole had a certain Mrs. Lumpstrom come in every afternoon to "do" for him; she was a large lady of quite unimpeachable respectability who talked a good deal, mostly about her sciatica. Hubert took long walks along the shore, he collected sea shells and stamps, and sometimes played a little chess with masculine acquaintances. He was not an unhappy man, and you could not call him a happy man either; he vaguely missed Emma, his late wife, with whom he had lived for eighteen reasonably

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happy years; he missed his classes and his students; he was not overfond of being on the shelf but a mild coronary attack had made it indicated. But he sometimes felt that life had passed him by.

Hubert Poole did however have certain mild expectations. His Uncle George, the black sheep of the mother's side of his family, had no other heirs. Uncle George had lived out most of his busy life in Paris; he had also roamed around the odd corners of the old world, collecting paintings and art-objects and curiosities; his morals were probably no better than they should have been. But finally the old rake passed on to his reward, as the saying goes. Hubert had been advised of this by cable, though too late for him to think of attending the last rites. The estate itself took an interminable time to settle, French courts being what they are. But finally there came the day; there was a check for a pleasantly imposing number of francs; there was also a package of oddments left over from the final auction of Uncle George's effects.

Hubert Poole opened the package a few minutes after the postman came, naturally saving the French stamps for his collection. The carefully wrapped contents were, on the whole, somewhat disappointing. There was a clay tablet, presumed to be early Babylonian, covered with chicken tracks. There was an Egyptian scarab, a really beautifully and intricately carved scarabaeus, in what appeared to be solid gold. There was a nasty little grinning African god in ebony or some other black heavy wood, and then there were the Japanese prints, very artistic indeed, but depicting so graphically certain boudoir activities that Hubert blushed and put them hastily out of sight; they were certainly not for the eyes of Mrs. Lumpstrom.

And finally, there was the bottle — if, indeed, it was a bottle at all. It looked rather more like a small jug, made of glass. No, on second look it wasn't really glass; it was made of some semiprecious stone; it was grayish and greenish and shot with purple; it was cool to the touch, like jade. There was a surprising patina about it, as Hubert discovered when he ventured to rub it hard with his handkerchief. It had a sort of odd, luminous glow. . . .

It had been stoppered, too, with some sort of wax that had blackened into obsidian with the centuries. There was also a seal, with cryptic markings. Could this be the fabled Seal of Solomon? Hubert smiled at himself for wondering, but there was no denying that he did have a romantic streak in his nature. He could, of course, no more have refrained from opening that bottle than he could have stopped breathing. So he calmly took out his penknife and dug away at the seal and the ancient black wax. It resisted and flaked and then gave way; a curl of bluish smoke erupted and the room was suddenly filled with a

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powerful, almost cloying perfume.

"It has finally happened," Hubert Poole said to himself. "I have lost my marbles; I am as nutty as a fruitcake. According to the books, the smoke will fill the room and then coalesce into a horrible demon, twelve feet tall and black and terrible. I wonder if I shouldn't go take an aspirin?"

But there wasn't time to take an aspirin, and this thing didn't seem to be going by the books. There was no evil black genie. The blue smoke swirled and turned and twisted and then suddenly solidified into a very remarkable, very amazing young woman; she was more beautiful than anything outside the dreams of a very young man or a poet. And she was unconventionally clad in absolutely nothing at all; she was stark staring naked. Hubert Poole found himself unable to say anything, even to quote from the classics that he knew so well; he was at the moment finding it somewhat difficult to breathe. She couldn't be there—but she was! Her hair was long, and purplish-black as a raven's wing, her face was heartshaped, and her breasts were nubile. She was indeed a lot of woman to have standing so close, and smelling so sweet; she had the impact of a Mack truck. And she was smiling.

"*N'go al waz aba kryt?*" she said softly, and her voice was music.

Hubert Poole blinked and shook his head, but when he opened his eyes she was still there, very much there. It has been written somewhere that no man can stay astonished long, and that in a few minutes one must somehow come to terms even with a ghost. This was no ghost; the apparition was obviously living and breathing, even if her sudden appearance here out of the bottle and out of the blue smoke broke all the rules, all the laws of nature. And it must be said that Hubert Poole was a man, a very polite man too.

"I'm afraid I don't speak Arabic," he apologized.

"Arabic-shmarabic! The tongue I used was forgotten before Arabic was invented even!"

Hubert Poole leaned back in his chair, still wishing wistfully for that aspirin. "You—you speak English?" he gasped, still momentarily expecting the men in white jackets to come and take him away.

"Of course I do!" the lovely houri said indignantly. "I will have you know that I am of the Jinn, and we have special powers about languages and other things. But if you'll pardon me now, there are certain formalities to get over with. I have to go into my act." She made certain formal gestures, not to be described. "I am your slave, Master. I am yours forever to command, to send and fetch and obey. I kiss your feet."

Hubert stood or rather sat fast and firm. "Lincoln freed the slaves, and I distinctly don't want my feet kissed!"

"No matter," the lovely houri

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said reasonably. "It was only a figure of speech. Consider your feet kissed. I would, since I am of an affectionate disposition, rather kiss you otherwise. But the fact remains that you have unloosed me from the bottle, and that I am, by an old compulsion put upon me, really and truly your slave, forever. Now, for your first command I suggest —"

"I suggest that you put on some clothes, young woman. You disturb me!"

In less than half an instant she was appareled in voluminous red trousers, a sort of halter around her breasts, and a pair of odd gold slippers; she also suddenly sported a considerable amount of bracelets and rings. The garments were distinctly on the transparent side, and hardly calculated to allay Hubert Poole's disturbance. Indeed, he found that speculation concerning the nominally concealed areas was, if anything, more distracting than the Euclidean contemplation of beauty bare. But the token gesture of obedience served to put him slightly more at ease.

"Now for the palace," she said briskly. "White Parian marble, with eighty chambers and halls of wonder and delight? Something on the general lines of the Taj Mahal, perhaps, with a pool and a dozen sprinkling fountains?"

It was a lovely suggestion, but Hubert thought twice. "Not on this sixty-foot lot," he interposed hastily. "The neighbors would certainly start asking all sorts of questions, and the building inspectors would come around looking at the plumbing and the wiring and the foundations. And really! A place of that size — the servant problem alone would make it impossible. Mrs. Lumpstrom could never handle it; she has trouble enough with this four-room house."

She shrugged her lovely shoulders. "So all right, the palace is out — and I had wanted so much to try my hand at architecture! Well then, I will bring you gold in abundance, the pure soft red gold of Ophir. I will bring you diamonds and rubies and emeralds as big as plovers' eggs, by the basketful. OK, Master?"

"Wait," Hubert Poole commanded. "You don't quite get the picture, my dear."

"Call me Lili. Short for Lilith. I have had other names, but I like that one best."

"Very well, Lili. You have evidently been out of touch with things for some eons. Nowadays nobody is permitted to own gold, except dentists. They dig it up out of the ground and then they take it away and bury it at Fort Knox; don't ask me why. And as for the fabulous jewels — there would have to be customs duties and import duties and all sorts of taxes and explanations, and what in the world would I actually *do* with these baskets of diamonds and emeralds and rubies?"

"I can see," Lili said slowly, "that

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you are going to be a very difficult Master." She brightened. "But look at it this way. You are still really in the prime of life — and very handsome too, with that distinguished curly gray hair above your tan. I could *go* for you, and if perchance you eventually tire of me —"

"Goodness gracious!" gasped Hubert Poole.

"As I said, if you tire of me — and it is supposed to happen sometimes, though I've had no personal experience since this is really my first assignment — I will produce for your delight all the fabulous beauties of history. Cleopatra, and Deirdre, and Helen of Troy, and Semiramis and Thais. In the flesh, or at least in a reasonably accurate facsmile."

It must be admitted that at this point in the incredible conversation Hubert Poole was really tempted; he was a vigorous, entirely normal man who sometimes tired of his hermit's existence; he also as a historian had a deep interest in the past and its fabled ladies. But he also had a certain realistic streak in his nature. "I must admit to you, dear Lili," he said slowly, "that this is a most tempting proposal. There could have been a time. 'The face that launched a thousand ships, and burned the topless towers of Illium.' And Deirdre — 'No man can now be friend of that dead queen.' And so on and so on. But my dear, I am 57 years old. Frankly, I do not think that I could hold up more than a week under this interesting but most demanding regime you suggest. If I remember correctly, Helen was a mere slip of fifteen. Deirdre, Queen of Sorrows, would be dismal company. According to history, Cleopatra had a very prominent nose and a domineering disposition; she was also married to her own brother, among other gentlemen. And as for Semiramis and Thais, and all the rest of them — heavens, no! I could never find any happiness in the embraces of those lovely dead ghosts, who have had their crowded hours and lived out their years, even if you could somehow momentarily evoke their shadows with your dark magics. It saddens me to decline, but decline I must. And you, lovely and desirable as you certainly are—"

"You do like me, then?" She came suddenly closer, and her perfume almost overwhelmed him.

"You are," admitted Hubert Poole fervently, "more beautiful and desirable than anything I had ever imagined! You are also, if I may put it bluntly, far far too young and lissome for a man of my age and settled habits. I was happy, or reasonably contented, with Emma, my late wife. Though I admit she snored. And you must try to understand this. If you were to stay on here as my — well, in any capacity at all, I could never think of a way of explaining you to the neighbors. Or for that matter to Mrs. Lumpstrom, my housekeeper."

Lili frowned, and looked disdainfully around the little living room.

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"I can't say much for her housekeeping. The windows need washing and the ashtrays need polishing, and as for the rugs — well, never mind!"

"Mrs. Lumpstrom does her best, and she suits me fairly well, on the whole. Although I must honestly admit that her cooking sometimes leaves things to be desired; she fries everything."

"That's it! *Food!*" cried Lili happily. "Listen, Master! I will bring you rare viands from the corners of the world. I will bring you hummingbirds' tongues and breast of auk and a goose stuffed with a capon stuffed with a lark stuffed with an oyster stuffed with an olive! Filet of Siberian mammoth! Iguana under glass! Delicacies beyond any epicure's wildest imagining — and of course to go with them the rarest of fine wines, fit for an emperor's table: the vintage champagnes . . ."

"That would be all very nice. But I'm afraid, my dear, that I have somewhat simpler tastes. A couple of poached eggs or an omelette in the morning, a can of beans for lunch, and perhaps a small steak or a chop for dinner. And I have never had much of a taste for wine; my mild highball in the evening is quite sufficient."

Lili bit her soft lips in vexation, and then she brightened again. "I know!" she said. "I've got the answer to everything. It will take a bit of doing, but I can read up on the spells. I'll make you young again!"

Now Hubert Poole did hesitate. "*Youth!*" he whispered. "It is terribly tempting, tempting indeed. But even if you do have the power to make me twenty again, I'm not sure — no, I don't think I could go through all that again, all that pressing and hoping and striving. To everything there is a time appointed. I wouldn't be happy to be twenty with the load of all my memories; I wouldn't care to erase them either. I guess I am really quite happy with myself as I am; I don't think I want to change. I am fairly happy with my fishing and my flowers and my books and my chess. No thank you, dear little Lili."

The adorable, delectable houri strode up and down the room, evidently in more than a bit of a temper. "But surely there must be *something*," she cried. "Look, I'm a Jinni; I got power. Magic power, I admit. But what about real power? Wouldn't you care to be king, or rajah, or dictator, or whatever they call the top job now?"

He shook his head stubbornly. "My dear, nobody in his right mind would want to be head of a state in these parlous times; it is the toughest and most thankless job in the world. You break your heart, or the pressure of too much weight breaks it for you. It is very tempting and all that, but Lili, I'm afraid I just don't have any use for your magics. I'm sorry, but I fear that you'll just have to go back into the bottle."

Her face was abjectly stricken.

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"Oh, no, Master! You don't know what it's like to spend five thousand years cramped up in a tiny miserable thing like that! It's a fate far worse than death, believe me. You couldn't, you wouldn't, do that to me!" She was imploring.

"It's really quite a pretty little bottle," he began, fidgeting. "You don't suppose that you could adjust —?"

"No, I couldn't!"

He pondered. "Well, I don't know too much about these things, but I seem to remember that in such circumstances it is theoretically possible for me to free you and relieve you of your slavery and send you back where you originally came from."

"*The hell you say!*" The beautiful heart-shaped face was blank with horror. "You can suggest that, when you know where we Jinni come from?"

"That?"

"*That!* Eblis itself, and compared to it your Methodist hell is a Sunday School picnic, believe me." She knelt at his feet. "Oh, Master, *please!*"

"Then what?" Hubert Poole said, uncomfortably.

Lili rose to her feet, her soft round shoulders sagging. "But I just don't want to go away! I like it here. This tiny house of yours is perfectly charming, or could be with a little work. I think you're a dear, and the ocean and the hills are so beautiful! You just can't be that hard-hearted! Look, Master. This is my maiden voyage, my tryout, my first chance. I was never meant to spend eternity in a nasty little bottle. And as far as my going back to Eblis it is just completely out of the question; I'd have to go back there rejected and unwanted, with a white mark against my record. And I'd be the laughingstock of all the Ghouls, those nasty, sneering things! Not to speak of the Afreets, with their pats and their pinches . . ." Lili shuddered. Then she leaned closer to Hubert Poole; he felt his pulses pounding disturbingly, and no wonder. "Of course," she whispered, "if you really don't like me at all, I'll go away quietly."

"But I *do* like you!" he swiftly protested. "Please don't take it that way. You are definitely the loveliest and most attractive thing I have ever encountered; it's just that you are too lovely and much too young for an aging man of settled habits. I just couldn't possibly cope with you."

She was not easily dissuaded; few women are. "Then Master, couldn't I just stay with you here for a week, or even a few days? This is really such a beautiful world; in the bottle I'd almost forgotten how truly beautiful it can be. Can't I maybe just stay overnight? Can't I just have one chance to see the stars and the moon? You yourself can't possibly imagine what it means not to have seen the stars and the moon for five

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thousand years. Please, please, *pretty-please?*"

"No dice." He hardened his heart, with considerable difficulty. She was very close and very ardent, and her garments were very very transparent. "I should have ordered you into a Mother Hubbard," he said. He swallowed with difficulty, but he was still firm; he had to be. "No, dear Lili. You've come too late. You just couldn't possibly fit into my quiet life. As I said before, I could never explain you to anybody. Mrs. Lumpstrom will be here in a moment, and you'll have to be gone and I'll have to open all the doors and windows and air out the place; that oriental perfume of yours is a trifle pervading and Mrs. Lumpstrom will think — oh, she will think all sorts of things; she reads confession magazines. I'm truly sorry, Lili."

"I'm sorry too," said Lili. "You are the first chance I've had at a man in five thousand years. I may be a Jinni, but I am also a woman; and a woman scorned . . ."

It was at that reasonably inauspicious moment that Mrs. Lumpstrom chose to come waddling up the walk. "Disappear!" ordered Hubert Poole; if he had had more time he could have worded it better. Lili made herself invisible in the twinkling of an eye, but she had not departed. There was no time to do anything about her perfume, and when the housekeeper commented on it Hubert Poole tried valiantly to explain it away as the aftereffect of his new shaving-lotion.

"A man of your age!" commented Mrs. Lumpstrom. "As I have always said, there is no fool like an old fool!" She puttered about the rooms with her broom and dustpan and mop, but she definitely had more to say when she was pinched several times in the derriére during the next few hours; she naturally blamed Mr. Poole, though he was very obviously across the room at the time, trying hard to be engaged with his newspaper.

"I just couldn't help it; she was sweeping the dust under the rug!" came a soft whisper in his ear. There were certain tender caresses out of nowhere; Lili, while invisible, was of the fond and friendly type.

"That will be enough!" said Hubert Poole, not realizing that he spoke aloud.

"It is certainly enough for me," said Mrs. Lumpstrom. "I don't know what is going on here, but I am a respectable woman and I have had quite enough of it. I will thank you for my time, and you can go and find yourself another day-lady." She took her "time," which amounted to five dollars and some cents, and departed in high dudgeon.

"Good riddance!" came the invisible voice. But by this time things had been going just too fast for Hubert Poole.

"I have had quite enough for now," he said firmly. "Back into the bottle, witch! I command you — or

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is it *thee?*" So Lili moaned but went; he put the bottle on his bedside table and all night long he listened to little kitten-cat mews from within the accursed thing; they were very faint but just enough to keep him awake. He was a man who needed his sleep; at dawn he opened his window wide and hurled the bottle as hard as he could down toward the beach. Then he slept.

He slept, that is, until he was awakened by three small boys who had come to his door to show him the lovely little bottle they had found, and would he give them a quarter for it? He did so, and then put on his shorts and went down to the very edge of the rocks and threw the bottle out into the deep blue Pacific. It was only the next day that a neighbor's eighteen-year-old son, an adept skindiver, appeared with the bottle. "Found it on the bottom offshore when I was going down for abalone," announced the bronzed youth. "Knew you collected things, and so I thought maybe . . .?"

Hubert Poole resignedly gave the young man five dollars. But he steeled himself; that afternoon he went out on a fishing barge, four miles offshore, and quietly dropped the bottle into 300 fathoms of water. He then pretended to fish for awhile, took the shore-boat home, had a fairly dismal supper out of cans, and went to bed. He slept fitfully until almost dawn, when he was rudely awakened by the dripping of cold water on his face, and by the touch of cold lips on his mouth. Lili was back, stark and naked and lovely and shivering.

"Now you listen, young lady —"

"*You* listen, Master!" Her teeth were chattering. "Just never underestimate the power of a Jinni. I haven't broken any of the rules; the stopper you put on that damn bottle was only scotch tape, and it dissolved in the salt water. Besides, you made a slight mistake or two in the wording of the Seal. Technically I'm clear. Only —"

"Only what? We've settled this. I told you; I now command you —"

"Please listen first," she begged him. "Because I've got it all worked out. After tonight you'll never see me again. Nobody will. But right now I'm absolutely freezing; that ocean is icy cold."

"You could put on some clothes."

"I *could* fly us to warmest Araby. I could have imps bring us a brazier of scented coals. I could — I'd rather get into bed," Lili said in an unprecedentedly small voice, and promptly did.

What is out of the question as a long-term undertaking may be possible and even imperative on a single isolated occasion. And she *had* said he'd never see her again . . .

"It's OK, Master-baby," she reassured him. "I *do* know the answer for us. You'd be amazed how much thinking a girl can do in a bottle at three hundred fathoms. And from tomorrow on there'll be no more

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Lili to complicate your simple life."

And in due course they slept.

They rose late, and Hubert Poole steeled himself for farewells.

"But I didn't say *that*," said Lili, surprised. "I said that nobody'd ever see *me* again. Because I'm not going to be here as me, but . . ."

So it was that Hubert Poole went away for a week's vacation, to return as a bridegroom. His new wife is in the pleasant forties, curvaceous, slightly plump, housewifely. She has taken over the little pink house, washed the windows and polished the ashtrays; she has made friends with the neighbors over the back fence and otherwise fits into his life like a duck's foot fits in the mud.

The slight rearrangement of Lili's age and appearance was the last fling she had at major magic, at Hubert's firm insistence. It is reported that she did reserve the right to be her earlier self for one night a year, on the ancient Feast of Ramadan; she was all woman but she still had some Jinni in her. Whether sometimes she practiced some minor magics is not known, but it is on the record that Hubert Poole's luck at chess and fishing improved steadily from that time forth (he caught the largest sea bass of the season) and that his azaleas and camellias took numerous prizes at the local flower shows.

The Basis Is Fun

Reasons for registering at once for the 14th World Science Fiction Convention, by sending $2 to the World Science Fiction Society, Box 272, Radio City Station, New York 19:

The Convention, from Friday, August 31 through Monday, September 3, will occupy an entire floor of New York's Biltmore Hotel, with such facilities as few previous conventions have enjoyed.

The guest of honor will be Arthur C. Clarke — and I can think of no one more deserving the laurels.

Under the guidance of Ron Smith, one of s.f.'s ablest amateur editors, the progress reports promise to be the best yet.

You'll meet at the Biltmore such F&SF authors, in addition to the honored guest and your convention-avid editor, as Isaac Asimov, James Blish, Robert Bloch, L. Sprague de Camp, Damon Knight, Theodore Sturgeon and Wilson Tucker — and, if you can fight your way through the mobs, Mildred Clingerman and Judith Merril. . . .

Most important: the Convention Committee has announced its policy in these admirable words: "The basis for all our plans is simple: let's have fun."

So let's!

— A. B.

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Recommended Reading

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

THE TROUBLE WITH BEING A MASTER is that people unreasonably expect you to produce masterpieces — and professional reviewers, though they should know better, are just as unreasonable as anybody else.

If there's a certain reservation, even disappointment in my tone when I speak of Robert A. Heinlein's DOUBLE STAR (Doubleday, $2.95*), it is (I can realize objectively) because I was expecting too much of Heinlein's first "adult" novel in four and a half years — and indeed (as is somewhat startling when one comes to think of it) only the second novel that he has ever written for adult book-readers.

Many of Heinlein's "teen-age" books have been stronger, both as novels of character and as science fiction; but the point — which I so belabor in order that you may enjoy the book on its own terms — is that here the master is quite deliberately not writing a masterpiece, but simply creating an agreeably entertaining light novel; and in that task he succeeds admirably.

In the year '15 of an unnamed century (this is not part of Heinlein's Future History), the most important politician in the solar system is kidnaped at a crucial moment, and his political assistants are forced to enlist an actor-double. The Great Lorenzo, unsuccessful but potentially brilliant, at last finds himself theatrically in this Zenda-like masquerade — and finds himself in other ways, too, as he comes to understand the delicate balance of interplanetary politics, the meaning of political service and the interrelation of the races of Mars and Earth.

Surprisingly from Heinlein, who has so often created alien beings so superlatively, the Martians are only vaguely sketched in; but otherwise the book bears the Heinlein cachet of credible authenticity. No one else reveals quite the same authority in filling in every detail so consistently and convincingly that the imagined future is as solidly real as the world outside your window.

But just as Dashiell Hammett was only the ablest of a large number of writers following the editorial policy of Cap Shaw in *Black Mask*, so this background of authentic detail is not so much characteristic of Heinlein, though he is its ablest practitioner, as of *Astounding*-as-edited-by-John-Campbell. DOUBLE

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STAR was an *Astounding* serial; and so was Frank Herbert's THE DRAGON IN THE SEA (Doubleday, $2.95*), which is as impressive in its cumulative depiction of a specialized scientific background as anything since Hal Clement's MISSION OF GRAVITY.

Here is s.f. of an immediate and purely earthly future, before civilization has gone interplanetary. The problems faced are not those of deep space, but of the deeps of the ocean as atomic "subtugs," in the sixteenth year of The War, provide a vital supply line by pirating oil from the USSR's undersea wells off Novaya Zemla.

To the inherent hazards of such a venture add a spy-plot (one man out of a four-man crew must be a Soviet plant), ingenious psychological detection, and speculations as to the place of religion in life and the possible evils of even a just war, and you have a novel absorbing in many respects; but what you'll most remember is the technological virtuosity with which Mr. Herbert creates his daring submarine service of the atomic future.

More spies appear in an even more immediate future in Pat Frank's FORBIDDEN AREA (Lippincott, $3.50*). Despite its future setting (around 1960) one wonders whether this may be strictly classified as science fiction; its technical developments in flight and weapons don't seem to go beyond what must already be at least in the drawing-board stage. But it's recommended to s.f. readers (and others) as an unusually tight, powerful and plausible melodrama of the hairsbreadth averting of all-out atomic war, in which both espionage and counter-espionage have a fact-like credibility rare in fiction.

Lee Correy's first adult novel, CONTRABAND ROCKET (Ace, 35c, with a reprint of Murray Leinster's THE FORGOTTEN PLANET), is markedly uneven in its writing, but nonetheless appealing. In an age of sternest government control of spaceflight, a group of devoted amateurs acquire an antiquated spaceship and resolve to make the first unofficial, free-initiative, joyously for-the-hell-of-it venture into space. It's a likable notion, and the technical and legal difficulties are ingeniously treated.

Earlier in this issue you've read Charles Beaumont's praise of M-G-M's FORBIDDEN PLANET, and I guess you should see the picture; but in the name of St. Thomas More, patron of s.f., I adjure you to stay away from the novelization by W. J. Stuart (Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, $3*; Bantam, 35c). Stripped of its electronic music and special effects, the story stands revealed as the most abysmally banal job of hackwork to pass itself off as s.f. since . . . well, since the last novelization of a s.f. film.

For several successive issues, last-minute space-adjustments have compelled the omission of 1955's last s.f. anthology: Donald A. Wollheim's ADVENTURES ON OTHER PLAN-

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ETS (Ace, 25c). If you can still find it on the stands, get it. It contains 5 long stories from *Startling* and *Astounding*, by Dee, Williams, Simak, Leinster and van Vogt, dealing with the interplay of man and extraterrestrials — all lively, unpretentious, ingenious and good fun, especially the Simak.

There've been more publications than usual of late in the field of "straight," non-scientific fantasy. Next month we'll view at some length one of the major achievements of fantasy literature: J. R. R. Tolkien's trilogy, THE LORD OF THE RINGS. Meanwhile, I'll note that the concluding volume is now available (THE RETURN OF THE KING, Houghton Mifflin, $5*) and go on to briefer notice of other imaginings.

One of the most distinguished pure fantasies I have read in years was published as a children's book (indeed with a specific upper age limit of 12!); but I hope that no reader of F&SF will overlook L. M. Boston's THE CHILDREN OF GREEN KNOWE (Harcourt, Brace, $2.75*). This tale of the time-interplay in an ancient house between a lonely modern child and a family of three children who died in the Great Plague is sheer literary magic: subtle, tenuous, enchanting and wholly convincing. Boston knows, like E. Nesbit, how to blend charm with darker suggestions of evil; and if the book inevitably recalls the classic juveniles of Nesbit, it also suggests such adult fantasies as Margaret Irwin's *The Earlier Service* (F&SF, December, 1951) or even THE TURN OF THE SCREW.

I am sure you remember John Dickson Carr's THE DEVIL IN VELVET (Harper, 1951; Bantam, 1953) as an extraordinary triple-threat masterpiece: at once a vivid historical novel, a flawless detective story, and a diabolically ingenious fantasy of time travel. Now, under the pseudonym of Carter Dickson, Mr. Carr has once more brought off the same triple feat in FEAR IS THE SAME (Morrow, $3.50*); and if the earlier novel was possibly a little better in each of its three aspects, the new one is still a trinity of delight. A middleweight contender, of noble blood, is in peril of arrest for murder . . . and suddenly finds himself back in the body of his titled ancestor, in 1795, in attendance upon the Prince of Wales who was later to become George IV. And the same murder is about to happen in this earlier age, with the same suspicion falling upon him. It's a grand adventure story (reaching a brilliant highpoint when our hero matches his boxing skill in a formal duel against two swordsmen), triply embellished by time-problems, deduction and historical color — and I don't know what more you could ask in the way of entertainment.

Leonard Wibberley's MCGILLICUDDY MCGOTHAM (Little, Brown, $2.75*) is, at least for habitual

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fantasy readers, disappointing after the author's wholly captivating THE MOUSE THAT ROARED. This brief tale of the woes of a leprechaun in Manhattan is pleasingly written, with occasional satiric edge and a nice avoidance of fake-Irish cuteness; but the story will seem oversimple, uninventive and echoing to the indoctrinated — something like an ably styled *Unknown* reject.

If you have fond memories of the insidious Dr. Fu Manchu, you should investigate Sax Rohmer's more recent fiendish world-conqueror, the exquisitely female Sumuru, who makes her latest appearance in SINISTER MADONNA (Gold Medal, 25c). I suppose that sober critical judgment should condemn the exploits of both Fu and Sumuru as trashy nonsense; but I have to confess that there are few tales I find so outrageously enjoyable. Indeed I feel about Rohmer much as P. Schuyler Miller seems to feel about Robert E. Howard: he's critically indefensible, but my God, such fun . . . ! Miller's introduction to the latest Howard volume, TALES OF CONAN (Gnome, $3*), is so spiritedly infectious that one almost succumbs to his enthusiasm . . . until one tries to read the four long stories adapted by L. Sprague de Camp from hitherto unpublished Howard manuscripts.

At last in book form, the sell-out Broadway musical DAMN YANKEES, by George Abbott and Douglass Wallop (Random, $2.95*), proves more brightly readable than the Wallop novel, THE YEAR THE YANKEES LOST THE PENNANT (Norton, 1954), from which it was adapted. If you aren't lucky enough to see it in the flesh (of Gwen Verdon and others) with the Adler-Ross score, at least console yourself by reading this happy transplantation of the Faust theme to the diamonds of major league baseball.

You'll find a pure distillation of the very spirit of fantasy in the poems of Leah Bodine Drake — as you know from her appearances in these pages. Her first collected volume, A HORNBOOK FOR WITCHES (Arkham, 1950), was restricted to fantasy. Her second, THIS TILTING DUST (Golden Quill, $2*), is largely devoted to more realistic verse — observant, imaginative, evocative, and fully deserving its $1,250 Borestone Mountain Poetry Award — but contains as well enough attractive verse-fantasies to lure the specialized reader or collector.

* Books marked with an asterisk may be ordered through F&SF's Readers' Book Service. For details, see page 128.

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Among the many subjects which Robert Bloch knows well are Hollywood, psychiatry and the works of Lewis Carroll. Put all three together, and you have one of the most fascinatingly unclassifiable novelets to reach this editorial desk in a long time. Try a spot of classification yourself when you've finished it. Is it fantasy? Science fiction? Or possibly just a simple truthful explanation of the nature of dreams?

All on a Golden Afternoon

by ROBERT BLOCH

THE UNIFORMED MAN AT THE GATE was very polite, but he didn't seem at all in a hurry to open up. Neither Dr. Prager's new Cadillac nor his old goatee made much of an impression on him.

It wasn't until Dr. Prager snapped, "But I've an appointment — Mr. Dennis said it was urgent!" that the uniformed man turned and went into the little phone booth to call the big house on the hill.

Dr. Saul Prager tried not to betray his impatience, but his right foot pressed down on the accelerator and a surrogate of exhaust did his fuming for him.

Just how far he might have gone in polluting the air of Bel-Air couldn't be determined, for after a moment the man came out of the booth and unlocked the gate. He touched his cap and smiled.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Doctor," he said. "You're to go right up."

Dr. Prager nodded curtly and the car moved forward.

"I'm new on this job and you got to take precautions, you know," the man called after him, but Dr. Prager wasn't listening. His eyes were fixed on the panorama of the hillside ahead. In spite of himself he was mightily impressed.

There was reason to be — almost half a million dollars' worth of reason. The combined efforts of a dozen architects, topiarists and landscape gardeners had served to create what was popularly known as "the Garden of Eden." Although the phrase was a complimentary reference to Eve Eden, owner of the estate, there was much to commend it in its literal sense, Dr. Prager decided. That is, if one can picture a Garden of Eden boasting two swimming pools, an eight-car garage, and a corps of resident angels with power mowers, pruning shears, and hoses.

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This was by no means Dr. Prager's first visit, but he never failed to be moved by the spectacle of the palace on the hill. It was a fitting residence for Eve, the First Woman. The First Woman of the Ten Box Office Leaders, that is.

The front door was already open when he parked in the driveway, and the butler smiled and bowed. He was, Dr. Prager knew, a genuine English butler, complete with accent and sideburns. Eve Eden had insisted upon that, and she'd had one devil of a time obtaining an authentic specimen from the employment agencies. Finally she'd managed to locate one — from Central Casting.

"Good afternoon," the butler greeted him. "Mr. Dennis is in the library, sir. He is expecting you."

Dr. Prager followed the manservant through the foyer and down the hall. Everything was furnished with magnificent taste — as Mickey Dennis often observed, "Why not? Didn't we hire the least inferior interior decorator in Beverly Hills?"

The library itself was a remarkable example of calculated decor. Replete with the traditional overstuffed chairs, custom-made by a firm of reliable overstuffers, it boasted paneled walnut walls, polished mahogany floors, and a good quarter-mile of bookshelves rising to the vaulted ceiling. Dr. Prager's glance swept the shelves, which were badly in need of dusting anyway. He noted a yard of Thackeray in green, two yards of brown Thomas Hardy, complemented by a delicate blue Dostoievsky. Ten feet of Balzac, five feet of Dickens, a section of Shakespeare, a mass of Moliere. Complete works, of course. The booksellers would naturally want to give Eve Eden the works. There must have been two thousand volumes on the shelves.

In the midst of it all sat Mickey Dennis, the agent, reading a smudged and dog-eared copy of *Confidential*.

As Dr. Prager stood hesitant in the doorway, the little man rose and beckoned to him. "Hey, Doc!" he called. "I been waiting for you!"

"Sorry," Dr. Prager murmured. "There were several appointments I couldn't cancel."

"Never mind the appointments. You're on retainer with us, aincha? Well, sweetheart, this time you're really gonna earn it."

He shook his head as he approached. "Talk about trouble," he muttered — although Dr. Prager had not even mentioned the subject. "Talk about trouble, we got it. I ain't dared call the Studio yet. If I did there'd be wigs floating all over Beverly Hills. Had to see you first. And you got to see *her*."

Dr. Prager waited. A good fifty per cent of his professional duties consisted of waiting. Meanwhile he indulged in a little private speculation. What would it be this time? Another overdose of sleeping pills — a return to narcotics — an attempt

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to prove the old maxim that absinthe makes the heart grow fonder? He'd handled Eve Eden before in all these situations, and topped it off with more routine assignments, such as the time she'd wanted to run off with the Mexican chauffeur. Come to think of it, that hadn't been exactly routine. Handling Eve was bad, handling the chauffeur was worse, but handling the chauffeur's wife and seven children was a nightmare. Still, he'd smoothed things over. He always smoothed things over, and that's why he was on a fat yearly retainer.

Dr. Prager, as a physician, generally disapproved of obesity, but when it came to yearly retainers he liked them plump. And this was one of the plumpest. Because of it he was ready for any announcement Mickey Dennis wanted to make.

The agent was clutching his arm now. "Doc, you gotta put the freeze on her, fast! This time it's murder!"

Despite himself, Dr. Prager blanched. He reached up and tugged reassuringly at his goatee. It was still there, the symbol of his authority. He had mastered the constriction in his vocal chords before he started to speak. "You mean she's killed someone?"

"No!" Mickey Dennis shook his head in disgust. "*That* would be bad enough, but we could handle it. I was just using a figger of speech, like. She wants to murder herself, Doc. Murder her career, throw away a brand-new seven-year noncancellable no-option contract with a percentage of the gross. She wants to quit the Industry."

"Leave pictures?"

"Now you got it, Doc. She's gonna walk out on four hundred grand a year."

There was real anguish in the agent's voice — the anguish of a man who is well aware that ten percent of four hundred thousand can buy a lot of convertibles.

"You gotta see her," Dennis moaned. "You gotta talk her out of it, fast."

Dr. Prager nodded. "Why does she want to quit?" he asked.

Mickey Dennis raised his hands. "I don't know," he wailed. "She won't give any reasons. Last night she just up and told me. Said she was through. And when I asked her politely just what the hell's the big idea, she dummied up. Said I wouldn't understand." The little man made a sound like trousers ripping in a tragic spot. "Damned right I wouldn't understand! But I want to find out."

Dr. Prager consulted his beard again with careful fingers. "I haven't seen her for over two months," he said. "How has she been behaving lately? I mean, otherwise?"

"Like a doll," the agent declared. "Just a living doll. To look at her, you wouldn't of thought there was anything in her head but sawdust. Wrapped up the last picture clean, brought it in three days ahead of schedule. No blowups, no goofs, no

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nothing. She hasn't been hitting the sauce or anything else. Stays home mostly and goes to bed early. Alone, yet." Mickey Dennis made the pants-ripping sound again. "I might of figgered it was too good to be true."

"No financial worries?" Dr. Prager probed.

Dennis swept his arm forward to indicate the library and the expanse beyond. "With *this?* All clear and paid for. Plus a hunk of real estate in Long Beach and two oil wells gushing like Lolly Parsons over a hot scoop. She's got more loot than Fort Knox and almost as much as Crosby."

"Er — how old is Eve, might I ask?"

"You might ask, and you might get some funny answers. But I happen to know. She's thirty-three. I can guess what you're thinking, Doc, and it don't figger. She's good for another dozen years, maybe more. Hell, all you got to do is look at her."

"That's just what I intend to do," Dr. Prager replied. "Where is she?"

"Upstairs, in her room. Been there all day. Won't see me." Mickey Dennis hesitated. "She doesn't know you're here, either. I said I was gonna call you and she got kind of upset."

"Didn't want to see me, eh?"

"She said if that long-eared nanny-goat got within six miles of this joint she'd —" The agent paused and shifted uncomfortably.

"Like I mentioned, she was upset."

"I think I can handle the situation," Dr. Prager decided.

"Want me to come along and maybe try and soften her up a little?"

"That won't be necessary." Dr. Prager left the room, walking softly.

Mickey Dennis went back to his chair and picked up the magazine once more. He didn't read, because he was waiting for the sound of the explosion.

When it came he shuddered and almost gritted his teeth until he remembered how much it would cost to buy a new upper plate. Surprisingly enough, the sound of oaths and shrieks subsided after a time and Dennis breathed a deep sigh of relief.

The Doc was a good headshrinker. He'd handle her. He was handling her. So there was nothing to do now but relax.

"Relax," Dr. Prager said. "You've discharged all your aggression. Now you can stretch out. That's better."

The spectacle of Eve Eden stretched out in relaxation on a chaise longue was indeed better. In the words of many eminent lupine Hollywood authorities, it was the best.

Eve Eden's legs were long and white and her hair was long and blonde; both were now displayed to perfection, together with a whole series of coming attractions screened

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through her semitransparent lounging pajamas. The face that launched a thousand close-ups was that of a petulant child, well-versed in the more statutory phases of juvenile delinquency.

Dr. Prager could cling to his professional objectivity only by clinging to his goatee. As it was, he dislodged several loose hairs and an equal number of loose impulses before he spoke again.

"Now," he said. "Tell me all about it."

"Why should I?" Eve Eden's eyes and voice were equally candid. "I didn't ask you to come here. I'm not in any jam."

"Mr. Dennis said you're thinking of leaving pictures."

"Mr. Dennis is a cockeyed liar. I'm not thinking of leaving. I've left, period. Didn't he call the lawyers? Hasn't he phoned the studio? I told him to."

"I wouldn't know," Dr. Prager soothed.

"Then he's the one who's in a jam," Eve Eden announced, happily. "Sure, I know why he called you. You're supposed to talk me out of it, right? Well, it's no dice, Doc. I made up my mind."

"Why?"

"None of your business."

Dr. Prager leaned forward. "But it is my business, Wilma."

"Wilma?"

Dr. Prager nodded, his voice softening. "Wilma Kozmowski. Little Wilma Kozmowski. Have you forgotten that I know all about her? The little girl whose mother deserted her. Who ran away from home when she was twelve, and lived around. I know about the waitress jobs in Pittsburgh, and the burlesque show, and the B-girl years; Frank, and Eddie, and Nino, and Sid and . . . all the others." Dr. Prager smiled. "You told me all this yourself, Wilma. And you told me all about what happened after you became Eve Eden. When you met me, you weren't Eve Eden yet; not entirely. Wilma kept interfering, didn't she? It was Wilma who drank, took the drugs, got mixed up with the men, tried to kill herself. I helped you fight Wilma, didn't I, Eve? I helped you *become* Eve Eden, the movie star. That's why it's my business now to see that you stay that way. Beautiful, admired, successful, happy —"

"You're wrong, Doc. I found that out. If you want me to be happy, forget about Eve Eden. Forget about Wilma, too. From now on I'm going to be somebody else. So please, just go away."

"Somebody else?" Dr. Prager leaped at the phrase. An instant later he leaped, literally.

"What's that?" he gasped.

He stared down at the floor, the hairs in his goatee bristling as he caught sight of the small white furry object that scuttled across the carpet.

Eve Eden reached down and scooped up the creature, smiling.

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"Just a white rabbit," she explained. "Cute, isn't he? I bought him the other day."

"But — but —"

Dr. Prager goggled. It was indeed a white rabbit which Eve Eden cradled in her arms, but not *just* a white rabbit. For this rabbit happened to be wearing a vest and a checkered waistcoat, and Dr. Prager could almost swear that the silver chain across the vest terminated in a concealed pocket-watch.

"I bought it after the dream," Eve Eden told him.

"Dream?"

"Oh, what's the use?" she sighed. "I might as well let you hear it. All you headshrinkers are queer for dreams, anyway."

"You had a dream about rabbits?" Dr. Prager began.

"Please, Doc, let's do it my way," she answered. "This time *you* relax and I'll do the talking. It all started when I fell down this rabbit-hole . . ."

In her dream, Eve Eden said, she was a little girl with long golden curls. She was sitting on a river bank when she saw this white rabbit running close by. It was wearing the waistcoat and a high collar and then it took a watch out of its pocket, muttering, "Oh dear, I shall be too late." She ran across the field after it and when it popped down a large rabbit-hole she followed.

"Oh no!" Dr. Prager muttered. "Not *Alice!*"

"Alice who?" Eve Eden inquired.

"*Alice in Wonderland.*"

"You mean that movie Disney made, the cartoon thing?"

Dr. Prager nodded. "You saw it?"

"No. I never waste time on cartoons."

"But you know what I'm talking about, don't you?"

"Well —" Eve Eden hesitated. Then from the depths of her professional background an answer came. "Wasn't there another movie, 'way back around the beginning of the thirties? Sure, Paramount made it, with Oakie and Gallagher and Horton and Ruggles and Ned Sparks and Fields and Gary Cooper. And let's see now, who played the dame — Charlotte Henry?"

Dr. Prager smiled. *Now* he was getting somewhere. "So that's the one you saw, eh?"

Eve Eden shook her head. "Never saw that one, either. Couldn't afford movies when I was a brat — remember?"

"Then how do you know the cast, and —"

"Easy. Gal who used to work with Alison Skipworth told me. She was in it, too. And Edna Mae Oliver. I got a good memory, Doc. You know that."

"Yes." Dr. Prager breathed softly. "And so you must remember reading the original book, isn't that it?"

"Was it a book?"

"Now look here, don't tell me

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you've never read *Alice in Wonderland*, by Lewis Carroll. It's a classic."

"I'm no reader, Doc. You know that, too."

"But surely, as a child you must have come across it. Or had somebody tell you the story."

The blonde curls tossed. "Nope. I'd remember if I had. I remember everything I read, that's why I'm always up on my lines. Best sight-reader in the business. I not only haven't read *Alice in Wonderland*, I didn't even know there was such a story, except in a screenplay."

Dr. Prager gave an irritable tug at his goatee. "All right. You *do* have a remarkable memory, I know. So let's think back now. Let's think back very carefully to your earliest childhood. Somebody must have taken you on their lap, told you stories."

The star's eyes brightened. "Why sure!" she exclaimed. "That's right! Aunt Emma was always telling me stories."

"Excellent." Dr. Prager smiled. "And can you recall now, the first story she ever told you? The very first?"

Eve Eden closed her eyes, concentrating with effort. When her voice came, it was from far away. "Yes," she whispered. "I remember now. I was only four. Aunt Emma took me on her lap and she told me my first story. It was the one about the drunk who goes in this bar, and he can't find the john, see, so the bartender tells him to go upstairs and —"

"No," said Dr. Prager. "No, no! Didn't she ever tell you any fairy tales?"

"Aunt Emma?" Eve Eden laughed. "I'll say she didn't. But stories, she had a million of 'em! Did you ever hear the one about the young married couple who —"

"Never mind." The psychiatrist leaned back. "You are quite positive you have never read or heard or seen *Alice in Wonderland?*"

"I told you so in the first place, didn't I? Now, do you want to hear my dream or not?"

"I want to very much," Dr. Prager answered, and he did. He took out his notebook and uncapped his fountain pen. In his own mind he was quite certain that she had heard or read *Alice*, and he was interested in the reasons for the mental bloc which prevented her from recalling the fact. He was also interested in the possible symbolism behind her account. This promised to be quite an enjoyable session. "You went down the rabbit-hole," he prompted.

"Into a tunnel," Eve continued. "I was falling — falling very slowly."

Dr. Prager wrote down *tunnel — womb fixation?* And he wrote down *falling dream.*

"I fell into a well," Eve said. "Lined with cupboards and bookshelves. There were maps and pictures on pegs."

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Forbidden sex knowledge, Dr. Prager wrote.

"I reached out while I was still falling and took a jar from a shelf. The jar was labeled ORANGE MARMALADE."

Marmalade — Mama? Dr. Prager wrote.

Eve said something about "Do cats eat bats?" and "Do bats eat cats?" but Dr. Prager missed it. He was too busy writing. It was amazing, now that he thought of it, just how much Freudian symbolism was packed into *Alice in Wonderland*. Amazing, too, how well her subconscious recalled it.

Eve was telling now how she had landed in the long hall with the doors all around, and how the rabbit disappeared muttering, "Oh my ears and whiskers, how late it's getting." She told about approaching the three-legged solid glass table with the tiny golden key on it and Dr. Prager quickly scribbled *phallic symbol*. Then she described looking through a fifteen-inch door into a garden beyond and wishing she could get through it by shutting up like a telescope. So Dr. Prager wrote *phallic envy*.

"Then," Eve continued, "I saw this bottle on the table, labeled DRINK ME. And so I drank, and do you know something? I did shut up like a telescope. I got smaller and smaller, and if I hadn't stopped drinking I'd have disappeared! So of course I couldn't reach the key, but then I saw this glass box under the table labeled EAT ME and I ate and got bigger right away."

She paused. "I know it sounds silly, Doc, but it was real interesting."

"Yes indeed," Dr. Prager said. "Go on. Tell everything you remember."

"Then the rabbit came back, mumbling something about a Duchess. And it dropped a pair of white gloves and a fan."

Fetichism, the psychiatrist noted.

"After that it got real crazy." Eve giggled. Then she told about the crying and forming a pool on the floor composed of her own tears. And how she held the fan and shrank again, then swam in the pool.

Grief fantasy, Dr. Prager decided.

She went on to describe her meeting with the mouse and with the other animals, and the Caucus-race, and the recital of the curious poem about the cur, Fury, which ended "I'll be judge, I'll be jury. . . . I'll try the whole case and condemn you to death."

Super-ego, wrote Dr. Prager, and asked, "What are you afraid of, Eve?"

"Nothing," she answered. "And I wasn't afraid in the dream, either. I liked it. But I haven't told you anything yet."

"Go on."

She went on, describing her trip to the rabbit's house to fetch his gloves and fan, and finding the unlabeled bottle in the bedroom. Then followed the episode of growth, and

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being stuck inside the house (*Claustrophobia*, the notebook dutifully recorded) and her escape from the animals who pelted her with pebbles as she ran into the forest.

It was *Alice*, all right, word for word, image for image. *Father-image* for the caterpillar, who might (Dr. Prager reasoned wisely) stand for himself as the psychiatrist, with his stern approach and enigmatic answers. The "Father William" poem which followed seemed to validate this conclusion.

Then came the episode of eating the side of the mushroom, growing and shrinking. Did this disguise her drug addiction? Perhaps. And there was a moment when she had a long serpentine neck and a pigeon mistook her for a serpent. A viper was a serpent. And weren't drug addicts called "vipers"? Of course. Dr. Prager was beginning to understand, now. It was all symbolic. She was telling about her own life. Running away, and finding the key to success — alternating between being very "small" and insignificant and trying every method of becoming "big" and important. Until she entered the garden — her Garden of Eden here — and became a star, and consulted him, and took drugs. It all made sense, now.

He could understand as she told of the visit to the house of the Duchess (*Mother-image*) with her cruel "Chop off her head." He anticipated the baby who turned into a pig and wrote down *rejection-fantasy*.

Then he listened to the interview with the Cheshire-Cat, inwardly marveling at Eve Eden's perfect memory for dialogue.

" 'But I don't want to go among mad people,' I said. And the crazy cat came back with, 'Oh, you can't help that. We're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad.' And I said, 'How do you know I'm mad?' and the cat said, 'You must be — or you wouldn't have come here.' Well, I felt plenty crazy when the cat started to vanish. Believe it or not, Doc, there was nothing left but a big grin."

"I believe it," Dr. Prager assured her.

He was hot on the trail of another scent now. The talk of madness had set him off. And sure enough, now came the Tea Party. With the March Hare and the Mad Hatter, of course — the *Mad* Hatter. Sitting in front of their house (*asylum*, no doubt) with the sleeping dormouse between them. *Dormouse — dormant* sanity. She was afraid of going insane, Dr. Prager decided. So much so did he believe it that when she quoted the line, "Why is a raven like a writing-desk?" he found himself writing down, *Why is a raving like a Rorschach test?*, and had to cross it out.

Then came the sadistic treatment of the poor dormouse, and another drug-fantasy with mushrooms for the symbol, leading her again into a beautiful garden. Dr. Prager heard it all: the story of the playing-card

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people (*club* soldiers and *diamond* courtiers and *heart* children were perfectly fascinating symbols, too!)

And when Eve said, "Why, they're only a pack of cards after all — I needn't be afraid of them," Dr. Prager triumphantly wrote, *paranoid fantasies: people are unreal.*

"Now I must tell you about the croquet game," Eve went on, and so she told him about the croquet game and Dr. Prager filled two whole pages with notes.

He was particularly delighted with Alice-Eve's account of conversation with the ugly Duchess, who said among other things, "Take care of the sense and the sounds will take care of themselves," and "Be what you would seem to be — or if you'd like it put more simply, Never imagine yourself not to be otherwise than what it might appear to others that what you were or might have been was not otherwise than what you had been would have appeared to them to be otherwise."

Eve Eden rattled it off, apparently verbatim. "It didn't seem to make sense at the time," she admitted. "But it does now, don't you think?"

Dr. Prager refused to commit himself. It made sense, all right. A dreadful sort of sense. This poor child was struggling to retain her identity. Everything pointed to that. She was adrift in a sea of illusion, peopled with Mock Turtles — *Mock* Turtle, very significant, that — and distorted imagery.

Now the story of the Turtle and the Gryphon and the Lobster Quadrille began to take on a dreadful meaning. All the twisted words and phrases symbolized growing mental disturbance. Schools taught "reeling and writhing" and arithmetic consisted of "ambition, distraction, uglification and derision." Obviously fantasies of inferiority. And Alice-Eve growing more and more confused with twisted, inverted logic in which "blacking" became "whiting" — it was merely an inner cry signifying she could no longer tell the difference between black and white. In other words, she was losing all contact with reality. She was going through an ordeal . . . a trial . . .

Of course it was a trial! Now Eve was telling about the trial of the Knave of Hearts, who stole the tarts. (*Hadn't Eve once been a "tart" herself?*) And Alice-Eve noted all the animals on the jury (*another paranoid delusion: people are animals*) and she kept growing (*delusions of grandeur*) and then came the white rabbit reading the anonymous letter.

Dr. Prager pricked up his own ears, rabbit-fashion, when he heard the contents of the letter:

My notion was that you had been
(Before she had this fit)
An obstacle that came between
Him, and ourselves, and it.

Don't let him know she liked them best,

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For this must ever be
A secret kept from all the rest
Between yourself and me.

Of course. A *secret*, Dr. Prager decided. Eve Eden had been afraid of madness for a long time. That was the root of all her perverse behavior patterns, and he'd never probed sufficiently to uncover it. But the dream, welling up from the subconscious, provided the answer.

"I said I didn't believe there was an atom of meaning in it," Eve told him. And the Queen cried, 'Off with her head,' but I said, 'Who cares for *you*? You're nothing but a pack of cards.' And they all rose up and flew at me but I beat them off, and then I woke up fighting the covers."

She sat up. "You've been taking an awful lot of notes," she said. "Mind telling me what you think?"

Dr. Prager hesitated. It was a delicate question. Still, the dream-content indicated that she was perfectly well aware of her problem on the subliminal level. A plain exposition of the facts might come as a shock, but not a dangerous one. Actually, a shock could be just the thing now to lead her back and resolve the initial trauma, wherever it was.

"All right," Dr. Prager said. "Here's what I think it means." And in plain language, he explained his interpretation of her dream; pulling no punches, but occasionally his goatee.

"So there you have it," he concluded. "The symbolic story of your life — and the dramatized and disguised conflict over your mental status which you've always tried to hide. But the subconscious is wise, my dear. It always knows, and tries to warn. No wonder you had this dream, at this particular time. There's nothing accidental about it. Freud says —"

But Eve was laughing. "Freud says? What does he know about it? Come to think of it, Doc, what do you know about it, either? You see, I forgot to tell you something when I started. I didn't just *have* this dream." She stared at him, and her laughter ceased. "I bought it," Eve Eden said. "I bought it for ten thousand dollars."

Dr. Prager wasn't getting anywhere. His fountain pen ceased to function and his goatee wouldn't respond properly to even the most severe tugging. He heard Eve Eden out and waved his arms helplessly, like a bird about to take off. He felt like taking off, but on the other hand he couldn't leave this chick in her nest. Not with a big nest egg involved. But why did it have to be so involved?

"Go over that again," he begged, finally. "Just the highlights. I can't seem to get it."

"But it's really so simple," Eve answered. "Like I already told you. I was getting all restless and keyed-up, you know, like I've been before. Dying for a ball, some new kind of

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kick. And then I ran into Wally Redmond and he told me about this Professor Laroc."

"The charlatan," Dr. Prager murmured.

"I don't know what nationality he is," Eve answered. "He's just a little old guy who goes around selling these dreams."

"Now wait a minute —"

"Sure, it sounds screwy. I thought so too, when Wally told me. He'd met him at a party somewhere, and got to talking. And pretty soon he was spilling his you'll pardon the expression guts about the sad story of his life and how fed up he was with everything including his sixth wife. And how he wanted to get away from it all and find a new caper.

"So this Professor Laroc asked him if he'd ever been on the stuff and Wally said no, he had a weak heart. And he asked him if he'd tried psychiatry and Wally said sure, he'd been to Doc Weissnichtwer but it didn't help him any."

"Your friend went to the wrong analyst," Dr. Prager snapped, in some heat. "He should have come to a Freudian. How could he expect to get results from a Jungian —"

"Like you say, Doc, relax. It doesn't matter. What matters is that Professor Laroc sold him this dream. It was a real scary one, to hear him tell it, all about being a burglar over in England some place and getting into a big estate run by a little dwarf with a head like a baboon. But he liked it, liked it fine. Said he was really relaxed after he had it: made him feel like a different person. And so he bought another, about a guy who was a pawnbroker, only a long time ago in some real gone country. And this pawnbroker ran around having himself all kinds of women who —"

"*Jurgen*," Dr. Prager muttered. "And if I'm not mistaken, the other one was from *Lukundoo*. I think it was called 'The Snout.' "

"Let's stick to the point, Doc," Eve Eden said. "Anyway, Wally was crazy about these dreams. He said the Professor had a lot more to peddle, and even though the price was high, it was worth it. Because in the dream you felt like somebody else; you felt like the character you were dreaming about. And of course, no hangover, no trouble with the law. Wally said if he ever tried some of the stuff he dreamed about on real women they'd clap him in the pokey, even in Hollywood. He planned to get out of pictures and buy more. Wanted to dream all the time. I guess the Professor told him if he paid enough he could even *stay* in a dream without coming back."

"Nonsense!"

"That's what I told the man. I know how you feel, Doc. I felt that way myself before I met Professor Laroc. But after that it was different."

"You met this . . . person?"

"He isn't a person, Doc. He's a real nice guy, a sweet character.

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You'd like him. I did, when Wally brought him around. We had a long talk together. I opened up to him, even more than I have to you, I guess. Told him all my troubles. And he said, what was wrong with me was I never had any childhood. That somewhere underneath there was a little girl trying to live her life with a full imagination. So he'd sell me a dream for that. And even though it sounded batty, it made sense to me. He really seemed to understand things I didn't understand about myself.

"So I thought here goes, nothing to lose if I try it once, and I bought the dream." She smiled. "And now that I know what it's like, I'm going to buy more. All he can sell me. Because he was right, you know. I don't want the movies. I don't want liquor or sex or H or gambling or anything. I don't want Eve Eden. I want to be a little girl, a little girl like the one in the dream, having adventures and never getting hurt. That's why I made up my mind. I'm quitting, getting out while the getting is good. From now on, me for dreamland."

Dr. Prager was silent for a long time. He kept staring at Eve Eden's smile. It wasn't *her* smile — he got the strangest notion that it belonged to somebody else. It was too relaxed, too innocent, too utterly seraphic for Eve. It was, he told himself, the smile of a ten-year-old girl on the face of a thirty-three-year-old woman of the world.

And he thought *hebephrenia* and he thought *schizophrenia* and he thought *incipient catatonia* and he said, "You say you met this Professor Laroc through Wally Redmond. Do you know how to reach him?"

"No, he reaches me." Eve Eden giggled. "He sends me, too, Doc."

She was really pretty far gone, Dr. Prager decided. But he had to persist. "When you bought this dream, as you say, what happened?"

"Why, nothing. Wally brought the Professor here to the house. Right up to this bedroom, actually. Then he went away and the Professor talked to me and I wrote out the check and he gave me the dream."

"You keep saying he 'gave' you this dream. What does that mean?" Dr. Prager leaned forward. He had a sudden hunch. "Did he ask you to lie down, the way I do?"

"Yes. That's right."

"And did he talk to you?"

"Sure. How'd you guess?"

"And did he keep talking until you went to sleep?"

"I — I think so. Anyway, I did go to sleep, and when I woke up he was gone."

"Aha."

"What does that mean?"

"It means you were hypnotized, my dear. Hypnotized by a clever charlatan, who sold you a few moments of prepared patter in return for ten thousand dollars."

"But — but that's not true!" Eve Eden's childish smile became a

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childish pout. "It was *real.* The dream, I mean. It *happened.*"

"Happened?"

"Of course. Haven't I made that clear yet? The dream *happened.* It wasn't like other dreams. I mean, I could feel and hear and see and even taste. Only it wasn't *me*, it was this little girl. Alice. I was Alice. That's what makes it worthwhile, can't you understand? That's what Wally said, too. The dream-place is real, you *go* there, and you *are* somebody else."

"Hypnotism."

Eve Eden put down the rabbit. "All right," she said. "I can prove it." She marched over to the big bed — the bed large enough to hold six people, according to some very catty but authenticated reports. "I didn't mean to show you this," she said, "but maybe I'd better."

She reached under her pillow and pulled out a small object which glittered beneath the light. "I found this in my hand when I woke up," she declared. "Look at it."

Dr. Prager looked at it. It was a small bottle bearing a little white label. He shook it, and discovered that the bottle was half-filled with a colorless transparent liquid. He studied the label and deciphered the hand-lettered inscription which read, simply, DRINK ME.

"Proof, eh?" he mused. "Found in your hand when you woke up?"

"Of course. From the dream."

Dr. Prager smiled. "You were hypnotized. And before Professor Laroc stole away — and *stole* is singularly appropriate, considering that he had your check for ten thousand dollars — he simply planted this bottle in your hand as you slept. That's my interpretation of your proof." He slipped the little glass container into his pocket. "With your permission, I'd like to take this along," he said. "I'm going to ask you now to bear with me for the next twenty-four hours. Don't make any announcements about leaving the studio until I return. I think I can clear everything up to your satisfaction."

"But I am satisfied," Eve told him. "There's nothing to clear up. I don't want to —"

"Please." Dr. Prager brushed his beard with authority. "All I ask is that you be patient for twenty-four hours. I shall return tomorrow at this same time. And meanwhile, try to forget about all this. Say nothing to anyone."

"Now wait a minute, Doc —"

But Dr. Prager was gone. Eve Eden frowned for a moment, then sank back on the chaise lounge. The rabbit scampered out from behind a chair and she picked it up again. She stroked its long ears gently until the creature fell asleep. Presently Eve's eyes closed and she drifted off to slumber herself. And the child's smile returned to her face.

There was no smile, childish or adult, on Dr. Prager's face when he

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presented himself again to the gatekeeper on the following day.

His face was stern and set as he drove up to the front door, accepted the butler's greeting, and went down the hall to where Mickey Dennis waited.

"What's up?" the little agent demanded, tossing his copy of *Rave* to the floor.

"I've been doing a bit of investigating," Dr. Prager told him. "And I'm afraid I have bad news."

"What is it, Doc? I tried to get something out of her after you left yesterday, but she wasn't talking. And today —"

"I know." Dr. Prager sighed. "She wouldn't be likely to tell you, under the circumstances, Apparently she realizes the truth herself but won't admit it. I have good reason to believe Miss Eden is disturbed. Seriously disturbed."

Mickey Dennis twirled his forefinger next to his ear. "You mean she's flipping?"

"I disapprove of that term on general principles," Dr. Prager replied, primly. "And in this particular case the tense is wrong. *Flipped* would be much more correct."

"But I figgered she was all right lately. Outside of this business about quitting, she's been extra happy — happier'n I ever seen her."

"Euphoria," Dr. Prager answered. "Cycloid manifestation."

"You don't say so."

"I just did," the psychiatrist reminded him.

"Level with me," Dennis pleaded. "What's this all about?"

"I can't until after I've talked to her," Dr. Prager told him. "I need more facts. I was hoping to get some essential information from this Wally Redmond, but I can't locate him. Neither his studio nor his home seems to have information as to his whereabouts for the past several days."

"Off on a binge," the agent suggested. "It figgers. Only just what did you want from him?"

"Information concerning Professor Laroc," Dr. Prager answered. "He's a pretty elusive character. His name isn't listed on any academic roster I've consulted, and I couldn't find it in the City Directory of this or other local communities. Nor could the police department aid me with their files. I'm almost afraid my initial theory was wrong and that Professor Laroc himself is only another figment of Eve Eden's imagination."

"Maybe I can help you out, Doc."

"You mean you met this man, saw him when he came here with Wally Redmond that evening?"

Mickey Dennis shook his head. "No. I wasn't around then. But I been around all afternoon. And just about a half hour ago a character named Professor Laroc showed up at the door. He's with Eve in her room right now."

Dr. Prager opened his mouth and expelled a gulp. Then he turned and ran for the stairs.

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The agent sought out his overstuffed chair and riffled the pages of his magazine.

More waiting. Well, he just hoped there wouldn't be any explosions this afternoon.

There was no explosion when Dr. Prager opened the bedroom door. Eve Eden was sitting quietly on the chaise longue, and the elderly gentleman occupied an armchair.

As Dr. Prager entered, the older man rose with a smile and extended his hand. Dr. Prager felt it wise to ignore the gesture. "Professor Laroc?" he murmured.

"That is correct." The smile was a bland blend of twinkling blue eyes behind old-fashioned steel-rimmed spectacles, wrinkled creases in white cheeks, and a rictus of a prim, thin-lipped mouth. Whatever else he might be, Professor Laroc aptly fitted Mickey Dennis's description of a "character." He appeared to be about sixty-five, and his clothing seemed of the same vintage, as though fashioned in anticipation at the time of his birth.

Eve Eden stood up now. "I'm glad you two are getting together," she said. "I asked the Professor to come this afternoon so we could straighten everything out."

Dr. Prager preened his goatee. "I'm very happy that you did so," he answered. "And I'm sure that matters can be set straight in very short order now that I'm here."

"The Professor has just been telling me a couple of things," Eve informed him. "I gave him your pitch about me losing my buttons and he says you're all wet."

"A slight misquotation," Professor Laroc interposed. "I merely observed that an understanding of the true facts might dampen your enthusiasm."

"I think I have the facts," Dr. Prager snapped. "And they're dry enough. Dry, but fascinating."

"Do go on."

"I intend to." Dr. Prager wheeled to confront Eve Eden and spoke directly to the girl. "First of all," he said, "I must tell you that your friend here is masquerading under a pseudonym. I have been unable to discover a single bit of evidence substantiating the identity of anyone named Professor Laroc."

"Granted," the elderly man murmured.

"Secondly," Dr. Prager continued, "I must warn you that I have been unable to ascertain the whereabouts of your friend, Wally Redmond. His wife doesn't know where he is, nor his producer. Mickey Dennis thinks he's off on an alcoholic fugue. I have my own theory. But one fact is certain — he seems to have completely disappeared."

"Granted," said Professor Laroc.

"Third and last," Dr. Prager went on. "It is my considered belief that the man calling himself Professor Laroc did indeed subject you to hypnosis and that, once he had managed to place you in deep trance,

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he deliberately read to you from a copy of *Alice in Wonderland* and suggested to you that you were experiencing the adventures of the principal character. Whereupon he placed the vial of liquid labeled DRINK ME under your pillow and departed."

"Granted in part," Professor Laroc nodded. "It is true that I placed Miss Eden in a receptive state with the aid of what you choose to call hypnosis. And it is true that I suggested to her that she enter into the world of *Alice*, as Alice. But that is all. It was not necessary to read anything to her, nor did I stoop to deception by supplying a vial of liquid, as you call it. Believe me, I was as astonished as you were, to learn that she had brought back such an interesting souvenir of her little experience."

"Prepare to be astonished again, then," Dr. Prager said, grimly. He pulled the small bottle from his pocket and with it a piece of paper.

"What's that, Doc?" Eve Eden asked.

"A certificate from Haddon and Haddon, industrial chemists," the psychiatrist told her. "I took this interesting souvenir, as your friend calls it, down to their laboratories for analysis." He handed her the report. "Here, read for yourself. If your knowledge of chemistry is insufficient, I can tell you that H_2O means water." He smiled. "Yes, that's right. This bottle contains nothing but half an ounce of water."

Dr. Prager turned and stared at Professor Laroc. "What have you to say now?" he demanded.

"Very little." The old man smiled. "It does not surprise me that you were unable to find my name listed in any registry or directory of activities, legal or illegal. As Miss Eden already knows, I chose to cross over many years ago. Nor was 'Laroc' my actual surname. A moment's reflection will enable you to realize that 'Laroc' is an obvious enough anagram for 'Carroll', give or take a few letters."

"You don't mean to tell me —"

"That I am Lewis Carroll, or rather, Charles Lutwidge Dodgson? Certainly not. I hold the honor of being a fellow-alumnus of his from Oxford, and we did indeed share an acquaintance —"

"But Lewis Carroll died in 1898," Dr. Prager objected.

"Ah, you *were* interested enough to look up the date," the old man smiled. "I see you're not so skeptical as you pretend to be."

Dr. Prager felt that he was giving ground and remembered that attack is the best defense. "Where is Wally Redmond?" he countered.

"With the Duchess of Towers, I would assume," Professor Laroc answered. "He chose to cross over permanently, and I selected *Peter Ibbetson* for him. You see, I'm restricted to literature which was directly inspired by the author's dream, and there's a rather small field available. I still have Cabell's

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Smirt to sell, and *The Brushwood Boy* of Kipling, but I don't imagine I shall ever manage to dispose of any Lovecraft — too gruesome, you know." He glanced at Eve Eden. "Fortunately, as I told you, I've reserved something very special for you. And I'm glad you decided to take the step. The moment I saw you, my heart went out to you. I sensed the little girl buried away beneath all the veneer, just as I sensed the small boy in Mr. Redmond. So many of you Hollywood people are frustrated children. You make dreams for others but have none of your own. I am glad to offer my modest philanthropy —"

"At ten thousand dollars a session!" Dr. Prager exploded.

"Now, now," Professor Laroc chided. "That sounds like professional jealousy, sir! And I may as well remind you that a permanent cross-over requires a fee of fifty thousand. Not that I need the money, you understand. It's merely that such a fee helps to establish me as an authority. It brings about the necessary transference-relationship between my clients and myself, to borrow from your own terminology. The effect is purely psychological."

Dr. Prager had heard enough. This, he decided, was definitely the time to call a halt. Even Eve Eden in her present disturbed state should be able to comprehend the utter idiocy of this man's preposterous claims.

He faced the elderly charlatan with a disarming smile. "Let me get this straight," he began, quietly. "Am I to understand that you are actually selling dreams?"

"Let us say, rather, that I sell experiences. And the experiences are every bit as real as anything you know."

"Don't quibble over words." Dr. Prager was annoyed. "You come in and hypnotize patients. During their sleep you suggest they enter a dream world. And then —"

"If you don't mind, let us quibble a bit over words, please," Professor Laroc said. "You're a psychiatrist. Very well; as a psychiatrist, please tell me one thing. Just what *is* a dream?"

"Why, that's very simple," Dr. Prager answered. "According to Freud, the dream-phenomenon can be described as —"

"I didn't ask for a description, Doctor. Nor for Freud's opinion. I asked for an exact definition of the dream-state, as you call it. I want to know the etiology and epistemology of dreams. And while you're at it, how about a definition of 'the hypnotic state' and of 'sleep'? And what is 'suggestion'? After you've given me precise scientific definitions of these phenomena, as you love to call them, perhaps you can go on and explain to me the nature of 'reality' and the exact meaning of the term 'imagination.'"

"But these are only figures of speech," Dr. Prager objected. "I'll

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be honest with you. Perhaps we can't accurately describe a dream. But we can observe it. It's like electricity: nobody knows what it *is*, but it's a measurable force which can be directed and controlled, subject to certain natural laws."

"Exactly," Professor Laroc said. "That's just what I would have said myself. And dreams are indeed like electrical force: indeed, the human brain gives off electrical charges, and all life — matter — energy — enters into an electrical relationship. But this relationship has never been studied. Only the physical manifestations of electricity have been studied and harnessed, not the psychic. At least, not until Dodgson stumbled on certain basic mathematical principles, which he imparted to me. I developed them, found a practical use. The dream, my dear Doctor, is merely an electrically charged continuum given a reality of its own beyond our own space-time continuum. The individual dream is weak. Set it down on paper, as some dreams have been set down, share it with others, and watch the charge build up. The combined electrical properties tend to create a *permanent* plane; a dream-continuum, if you please."

"I don't please," answered Dr. Prager.

"That's because you're not receptive," Professor Laroc observed smugly. "Yours is a negative charge rather than a positive one. Dodgson — Lewis Carroll — was positive. So was Lovecraft, and Poe, and Edward Lucas White, and a handful of others. Their dreams live. Others positively charged can live in them, granted the proper method of entry. It's not magic, there's nothing supernatural about it at all, unless you consider mathematics as magic. Dodgson did. He was a professor of mathematics, remember. And so was I. I took his principles and extended them, created a practical methodology. Now I can enter dream-worlds at will, cause others to enter. It's not hypnosis as you understand it. A few words of non-Euclidean formulae will be sufficient —"

"I've heard enough," Dr. Prager broke in. "Much as I hate to employ the phrase, this is sheer lunacy."

The Professor shrugged. "Call it what you wish," he said. "You psychiatrists are good at pinning labels on things. But Miss Eden here has had sufficient proof through her own experience. Isn't that so?"

Eve Eden nodded, then broke her silence. "I believe you," she said. "Even if Doc here thinks we're both batty. And I'm willing to give you the fifty grand for a permanent trip."

Dr. Prager grabbed for his goatee. He was clutching at straws now. "But you can't," he cried. "This doesn't make sense."

"Maybe not your kind of sense," Eve answered. "But that's just the trouble. You don't seem to understand there's more than *one* kind. That crazy dream I had, the one you

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say Lewis Carroll had first and wrote up into a book — it makes sense to you if you really *live* it. More sense than Hollywood, than this. More sense than a little kid named Wilma Kozmowski growing up to live in a half-million-dollar palace and trying to kill herself because she can't be a little kid any more and never had a chance to be one when she was small. The Professor here, he understands. He knows everybody has a right to dream. For the first time in my life I know what it is to be happy."

"That's right," Professor Laroc added. "I recognized her as a kindred spirit. I saw the child beneath, the child of the pure unclouded brow, as Lewis Carroll put it. She deserved this dream."

"Don't try and stop me," Eve cut in. "You can't, you know. You'll never drag me back to your world, and you've got no reason to try — except that you like the idea of making a steady living off me. And so does Dennis, with his lousy ten per-cent, and so does the studio with its big profits. I never met anyone who really liked me as a person except Professor Laroc here. He's the only one who ever gave me anything worth having. The dream. So quit trying to argue me into it, Doc. I'm not going to be Eve any more, or Wilma either. I'm going to be Alice."

Dr. Prager scowled, then smiled. What was the matter with him? Why was he bothering to argue like this? After all, it was so unnecessary. Let the poor child write out a check for fifty thousand dollars — payment could always be stopped. Just as this charlatan could be stopped if he actually attempted hypnosis. There were laws and regulations. Really, Dr. Prager reminded himself, he was behaving like a child himself: taking part in this silly argument just as if there actually was something to it besides nonsense-words.

What was really at stake, he realized, was professional pride. To think that this old mountebank could actually carry more authority with Eve Eden than he did himself!

And what was the impostor saying now, with that sickening, smile?

"I'm sorry you cannot subscribe to my theories, Doctor. But at least I am grateful for one thing, and that is that you didn't see fit to put them to the test."

"Test? What do you mean?"

Professor Laroc pointed his finger at the little bottle labeled DRINK ME which now rested on the table before him. "I'm happy you merely analyzed the contents of that vial without attempting to drink them."

"But it's nothing but water."

"Perhaps. What you forget is that water may have very different properties in other worlds. And this water came from the world of *Alice*."

"You planted that," Dr. Prager snapped. "Don't deny it."

"I do deny it. Miss Eden knows the truth."

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"Oh does she?" Dr. Prager suddenly found his solution. He raised the bottle, turning to Eve with a commanding gesture. "Listen to me, now. Professor Laroc claims, and you believe, that this liquid was somehow transported from the dream-world of *Alice in Wonderland.* If that is the case, then a drink out of this bottle would cause me either to grow or to shrink. Correct?"

"Yes," Eve murmured.

"Now wait —" the Professor began, but Dr. Prager shook his head impatiently.

"Let me finish," he insisted. "All right. By the same token, if I took a drink from this bottle and nothing happened, wouldn't it prove that the dream-world story is a fake?"

"Yes, but —"

"No buts. I'm asking you a direct question. Would it or wouldn't it?"

"Y-yes. I guess so. Yes."

"Very well, then." Dramatically, Dr. Prager uncorked the little bottle and raised it to his lips. "Watch me," he said.

Professor Laroc stepped forward. "Please!" he shouted. "I implore you — don't —"

He made a grab for the bottle, but he was too late.

Dr. Prager downed the half-ounce of colorless fluid.

Mickey Dennis waited and waited until he couldn't stand it any longer. There hadn't been any loud sounds from upstairs at all, and this only made it worse.

Finally he got the old urge so bad he just had to go on up there and see for himself what was going on.

As he walked down the hall he could hear them talking inside the bedroom. At least he recognized Professor Laroc's voice. He was saying something about, "There, there, I know it's quite a shock. Perhaps you'd feel better if you didn't wait — do you want to go now?"

That didn't make too much sense to Mickey, and neither did Eve's reply. She said, "Yes, but don't I have to go to sleep first?"

And then the Professor answered, "No; as I explained to him, it's just a question of the proper formulae. If I recite them we can go together. Er — you might bring your checkbook along."

Eve seemed to be giggling. "You too?" she asked.

"Yes. I've always loved this dream, my dear. It's a sequel to the first one, as you'll discover. Now if you'll just face the mirror with me . . ."

And then the Professor mumbled something in a very low voice, and Mickey bent down with his head close to the door but he couldn't quite catch it. Instead, his shoulder pushed the door open.

The bedroom was empty.

That's right, empty.

But he could swear he heard voices just a second ago. What had the Professor said? Something about facing the mirror?

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Mickey looked in the mirror, the big mirror above the mantelpiece.

For a moment he got a screwy idea he could see the Professor and Eve Eden reflected in the glass, with the light shining every which way and Eve somehow looking like a little kid with long golden curls. But that was crazy, of course.

Then the dressed-up white rabbit came hopping out from behind the bed and began to scamper around the floor.

Mickey didn't know how to explain that one, either. There was going to be a lot he couldn't explain. He'd never find out where Eve and the Professor had gone, because he'd never read *Through The Looking-Glass.*

And he'd never understand where Doc went, for that matter.

The rabbit began to scamper around the pile of clothing on the floor. Mickey recognized Doc's coat and trousers and shirt and necktie, but this didn't tell him anything, either.

Then he stooped and picked up the little bottle lying next to the empty clothes. He stared at the label reading DRINK ME.

Right now he could use a drink, Mickey decided, but this bottle was empty.

Maybe it was just as well.

Bright Destruction

Once there were hornstones hurled from Mercury,
And sardonyx and chalcedonius
And saphirs streamed from Mars and Uranus,
Flung from the falling temples of the sky.

Blende and beryl wander in the air.
High onyx hangs above Osiris' head,
Carving the earth where he is lying dead,
Static, like old chants suspended there.

Jupiter will edge Behemoth's bier
With ivory wonders, gold, and stolen jade,
When Saturn rings the jungles in its fear,
When Venus watches bright destruction made
To Neptune's own, Leviathan, the sea —
Bewildering in strange calamity.

WINONA McCLINTIC

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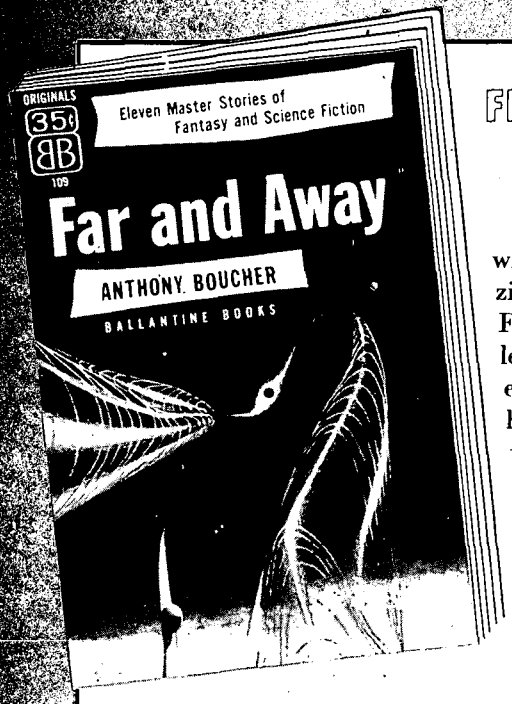

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